

THE
FAMILY INSTRUCTOR;
OR, A
REGULAR COURSE
OF
Scriptural Readings;

WITH
FAMILIAR EXPLANATIONS
AND
PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENTS,
ADAPTED TO THE PURPOSE OF
DOMESTIC AND PRIVATE EDIFICATION,
FOR EVERY DAY IN THE YEAR.

BY JOHN WATKINS, LL. D.

That nation must always be powerful where every man performs his duty :
and every man will perform his duty that considers himself as a being, whose
condition is to be settled to all eternity by the laws of Christ.

DR. JOHNSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON :
PRINTED FOR J. HATCHARD,
BOOKSELLER TO HER MAJESTY,
NO. 190, OPPOSITE ABBEY, PICCADILLY.
1814.

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P R E F A C E.

THAT Religion is the surest foundation of public security and private happiness, will hardly be questioned, even by those who consider reason as competent to discover the principles of knowledge, and to settle a system of morality. Though such persons may be satisfied with their own motives and inquiries, experience will force the conviction upon them, that something more than philosophy is requisite to illuminate the understandings of mankind in general, and to impress upon them the sense of their respective duties. Let this director be called by what name it may, the application of it shows, that as the mass of human beings cannot frame any uniform standard of faith, they must be governed by superiority of intellect; so that the only difference between the Christian and the moralist amounts to this, that the one submits to be guided by the revelation of God, and the other by the revelation of man.

The advocates for the unbounded freedom of the human mind, the strength of its powers, and the native purity of its character, are therefore compelled to allow that from a variety of causes reason is too weak for the passions, and that philosophy makes but slow progress in civilization. They confess in fact that man is so constituted as to render even moral instruction necessary to his well-being, and to the safety of the community. To this conclusion have

all our wise men arrived, after their ingenious speculations upon the innate beauty of virtue and their attempts to demonstrate what is called the law of nature, by arguments which go to prove, if indeed they can be said to prove any thing, that while the Creator of the universe has given instinct to other animals, he has left man to the sport of opinion and the impulse of chance. Conscious, then, that the rising generation should be prepared for the social relations of life, our enlightened sages, who condemn all revealed religion as such, are willing to maintain, for the want of something better, the preceptive parts of Scripture as well calculated to answer the purposes of tuition. Thus far the utility of the Inspired Volume is admitted; but nothing more of its contents must be adopted, it seems, than the practical lessons which it affords for the government of the temper, lest the mind should be filled with notions and prejudices which philosophy may find it difficult to eradicate. Here, however, it may be asked, of what service can that system be which is deprived of all authority, and how can reason be so powerful as is stated, if after all its researches it must be indebted to revelation for institutes to keep men from injuring one another? It is surely strange that any one should be laid under the obligation of a law, the origin of which he is at liberty to treat as a fable; and that while he is enjoined to live by the maxims of the Gospel, he may deny the doctrines upon which they are founded. The obvious tendency of such a course must be this, that when a man is brought to question the authenticity of the Scripture as a Divine Record, it will not be long before he discards it as a moral rule. If the dictates of virtue are stripped from the principles which give them the force of eternal truth, they will soon cease to have any influence upon the heart, and will only be

submitted to as the mere contrivances of ancient wisdom, which may be modified and regulated in conformity to the mutations of time and the improvements of society. Now, as a nation of philosophers has not yet been found, we must content ourselves with taking men as they are ; and such is the state of things, that whatever may be in the womb of futurity, nothing at present appears to warrant the removal of religion from its place in the system of education any more than from that of legislation. Even they who carry the licentiousness of sentiment to the greatest pitch, have so much respect for Christianity as to be desirous of its protection from barbarism, and are willing to see it so far predominant that they may sleep quietly in their beds. Such is the homage which Scripture receives from its adversaries, that while they endeavour to invalidate what it relates, they admit the excellence of what it teaches and the justice of what it commands. To the question, whether for the purpose of instruction we should confine ourselves to the mere precepts of Holy Writ, the best answer is this, that if the morality be good, the principles from which it flows must be good also ; and that the one cannot be more efficacious for the conduct of life than the other is for the information of the understanding. Now if error be in any case dangerous, he surely will be most likely to avoid it who is well grounded in that knowledge, which even by the confession of sceptics and libertines affords the most powerful inducements to virtue, and lays the greatest restraints upon vice. It must therefore be evident, that if the inspired Code is in any respect useful to qualify rational beings for the public service, the more it is studied with that view the better citizens men will become, because in all cases the sanctions of laws are stronger than the laws themselves. An objection, indeed, is commonly

the labour has never failed to bring rich consolation with it, by impelling the mind to the fountains of living waters, which give hope to the depressed and strength to the weak, patience to endure suffering, and fortitude to combat with all difficulties.

The grateful feelings and renovated desires thus excited cannot be so well expressed as in the language of the great Christian poet, which beautifully describes the advantage of a daily application to the source of wisdom and comfort treasured up in the Word of Life :

—Yet not the more
Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt
Clear spring, or shady grove, or sunny hill,
Smit with the love of sacred song ; but chief
Thee, Sion, and the flowery brooks beneath
That wash thy hallow'd feet, and warbling flow,
Nightly I visit.

MILTON, PAR. LOST, B. III.

THE
FAMILY INSTRUCTOR,
&c.

JANUARY THE FIRST.

THE CREATION.

Genesis, i. 31.—*And God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good.*

HUMAN wisdom never could have discovered the origin of things, nor by any process is it able to account for the construction of the universe. The philosopher may indeed frame an ingenious theory of the earth, and, from his knowledge of some parts of nature, he may become acquainted with the general laws which govern and preserve the system; but the infinite multiplicity of objects, and the variety of changes which they undergo, will continually perplex his observations; and the subtilty of that spring, by which action is performed and thought expressed, will elude his research through the whole extent of his inquiries.

What reason then cannot ascertain, when aided by the combination of talents, and the result of laborious investigation, it could not have discovered in the infancy of society and the ruder state of knowledge. Revelation was therefore necessary, even for the purpose of giving us this information, that the earth and the heavens originated in the will of God, and were disposed in order by his Word.

The sacred Volume begins with the statement of

this fact ; and the account which it gives of the formation of the world, though not discoverable by the principles, accords with the conclusions, of philosophy. The narrative is concise but regular, simple yet expressive, and rising by the force of native truth to the height of sublimity.

Though it treats of subjects which have in all ages excited the attention of profound inquirers into nature, the Mosaic cosmogony neither fatigues the mind by elaborate description, nor perplexes it by ambiguity of phrase and obscurity of explication.

The elementary substance, which was afterwards modified into various forms and adapted to several uses, came into existence by the expression of the Divine will. This primitive matter, in its native state, was an inactive mass, incapable of producing a weed, or giving life to a worm. Though prepared for all the purposes of vegetable and animal life, it had not the means of effecting any organization, till motion was communicated to it by an external agent. Accordingly the SPIRIT of GOD, moving upon the face of the abyss, brought the whole into order, and disposed it for the operation of the Divine Word, at whose command light issued forth and dispelled the primordial darkness. Thus the earth became a spherical body, revolving upon its axis ; day and night took their alternate turns, and time commenced with an unerring standard for the measurement of its course.

But before the process of vegetation could begin, it was expedient that the globe should be surrounded with that expansive fluid, which is the medium of light and the instrument of vitality. When this atmosphere was spread out over the earth, the inferior waters were collected into a capacious reservoir, and the dry land appeared covered with plants, flourishing in full vigour, and bearing the seeds necessary for the continuance of their respective kinds.

To diffuse light throughout the system, and to maintain the perpetual order of signs and seasons, days and years, the celestial bodies were placed in their several orbits around the great solar luminary, whose attractive force keeps them all in one harmonious course, and imparts to each the degree of heat and splendour suited to its distance, magnitude, and condition. A secondary luminary, shining with reflected light, was at the same time placed as an attendant upon this earth, directing the flux and reflux of the waters, and adjusting, by its periodical revolutions, the divisions of time.

The great habitation being fitted up, and supplied with all things necessary to the support of life, animation was produced, in various forms, adapted to the appropriate elements and stations in which they were to move, and receiving the primary law of nature, "to fill the waters in the seas, and to multiply in the earth." When the globe was completed in its structure, furnished with magnificence, and peopled by an infinite variety of beings, the work of creation was crowned in the formation of man out of the dust of the earth, but "in the image of God." Of all the creatures, he alone had any knowledge of his Maker, who gave him dominion over the earth, directions for his sustenance, and rules for his conduct. Man, therefore, when he came from his Creator, was a religious being. All the creatures under him acted solely by the necessity of their nature, and by the original law impressed upon them; but to man a revelation was imparted, by which he became acquainted with his origin, the authority he had to exercise, and the duties he was to perform.

The Divine operations being perfected, and every disposition made for the continuance of nature, the Almighty is represented as ceasing from his work, and viewing it with complacency. In the history of its progress, the several parts were said to be good,

or adapted to the respective uses for which they were constituted; and upon the general survey of the system, the sacred historian says, "BEHOLD IT WAS VERY GOOD."

This expression is not to be understood as denoting mere admiration, but as an energetic act of the Eternal Mind, communicating that inherent virtue to the machine by which it was set in motion, and the operation of its several parts regulated and secured, for the general good. Amidst the apparent changes, which occur throughout the universe, the laws which govern the whole are fixed, being the same originally impressed upon the system at the beginning, and which must continue till the appointed time, when all shall be dissolved and give place to "new heavens and a new earth, wherein will dwell everlasting righteousness."

JANUARY THE SECOND.

THE FALL OF MAN.

Genesis, iii. 15.—*I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

THE character of man in Paradise was different from that in which he was created; for being now in a place of trust, his mind expanded with his circumstances, and, besides the instruction adapted to his new condition, he had a general acquaintance with the properties of the creatures: but what was of greater importance, he obtained information that the happiness he enjoyed might be lost by the want of restraint upon his sensual appetite. And the Lord said, "Of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat, for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." For the prohibition of this tree, the

reason is given in the explication of its character. What was implied by the knowledge of evil, and what intended by death, man could only learn by rebellion. Into this crime it was not possible for him to fall, without the influence of an external agent, since any propensity in himself to violate the command must have indicated a corrupt principle in his nature, with which it was not contaminated. But that evil existed before the creation of man is evident, because he was warned against acquiring the knowledge of it, and that under the penalty of death. Now none of the inferior creatures had the faculty of reasoning, or the organs of speech, consequently there could be neither the inclination nor the power in any of them to draw man from his duty. Yet there was one Being in possession of the knowledge forbidden to man, and with the art of persuasion calculated to lead him astray. This formidable adversary is thus introduced: "NOW THAT SERPENT was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made." All the versions have obscured the sense, by not expressing the distinction with which the cause of this mischief is pointed out. There is a marked contrast between the serpent and the creatures which the Lord God had made; the former therefore did not belong to any of the animals spoken of in the preceding history. It is observable that this serpent assumed superior intimation to man, even upon matters with which man alone, among the terrestrial creatures, was acquainted. "Ye shall not surely die," said he; "for God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

Though falsehood prevailed in this declaration, there was some truth mixed with the pernicious counsel. That death should follow the offence was expressly threatened, and it immediately took place, since the act produced corruption in all the faculties of man, and the knowledge of evil became the means of

his destruction. Of good he needed no other information than what he possessed; but of evil, what could he wish to know, since the nature of the attainment was to deprive him of the blessing which he enjoyed? The GOOD and the EVIL are here set in opposition to each other not merely as qualities, but as great and tremendous beings. Man was already acquainted with the one by an intimate relation, while against any knowledge of the other he was cautioned, in terms which could not be mistaken. Light and darkness might be as well assimilated in the natural, as the good and evil in the spiritual world. Man, by listening to the voice of the tempter, and aiming at celestial intelligence, became the bond-slave of the EVIL ONE, and thus acquired the knowledge of iniquity, in its various operations on the mind, and its fatal consequences throughout his faculties. The denunciation of death implied the separation of the soul from the fountain of life, rather than the mere dissolution of the corporeal frame, though this also made part of the punishment of man. Under this judgment he must have remained, unless the Divine mercy had interposed a remedy, and provided the means of redemption.

Accordingly, in the sentence passed upon the offenders, the shades of their guilt are discriminated; and when to man the promise of deliverance is given from the domination of the enemy, it is declared that the Saviour shall be more than human. "Unto the serpent God said, Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." But so far are the serpent tribes from feeding upon dust, that few reptiles are more eager for the living prey; we must therefore look for the meaning of this part of the sentence in the condition of the parties. The object of the

seducer in this transaction, was the entire destruction of man; who being made out of the dust, his corporeal and sensual parts became the prey of the serpent. What is carnal he shall continue to corrupt, and in this view be said to devour; but he shall destroy no more. All that sin defiles in the human race will therefore become the prey of the enemy, whose ravages may extend widely through many generations; which, in the Hebrew, are emphatically called the **LIVES** of the **SERPENT**, denoting that his days are numbered and his power limited. But an Avenger is promised to arise, even the seed of the woman, who, by destroying the dominion of the enemy, shall bring life and immortality again to light; that "as in Adam all died, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." 1 Cor. xv. 22.

JANUARY THE THIRD.

CAIN AND ABEL.

Genesis, iv. 4, 5.—*And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering; but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.*

THE first act of mercy after the fall was the communication of the light of prophecy, and this was followed by the institution of sacrifices. Though expelled from Paradise, man did not lose the Divine presence, but maintained a regular intercourse with the Lord, in an appointed worship. Notwithstanding this, so early did infidelity obtain an entrance in the world, that when the eldest born of man brought an offering at the stated time, or "the end of the days," his oblation consisted only "of the fruit of the ground; while his brother brought of the firstlings of his flock, and the fat thereof." The distinction between these offerings is explained by the Apostle:

"By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." Heb. xi. 4.

The season in which Cain appeared before the Lord "with the fruit of his ground" was evidently a yearly festival, set apart for the commemoration of the promise, faith in which was necessary for the acceptance of the sacrifice and the sanctification of the worshipper. This appears from the conduct of Abel, for he presented unto the Lord the best of his flock, even the "firstlings thereof," thereby expressing his faith in "the Lamb of God, who, in the fulness of time, should put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." In no other sense could Abel be said to have offered in faith, since even Cain believed in the existence of a Supreme Being. Neither was Cain such an infidel as to call in question the Divine interposition in human affairs; but he had no faith in the promise, and therefore his offering was dead. The quality of his offering was not evil in itself; but being of a nature different from what the Lord required as an atonement for sin, it became an abomination. This explains the Divine remonstrance, "If thou dost well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou dost not well, sin lieth at thy door," or remaineth uncovered, for thy plague and thy punishment. The sacrifice of Abel being conformable to the Divine appointment, and offered in faith of what it represented, became the atonement for his sin, or rather the seal of his pardon, through the covenant of redemption. In a literal sense, no lamb was an acceptable offering unto the Sovereign of the universe, nor could it ever be supposed that the blood of any animal had the virtue of cleansing the soul. The whole, therefore, must have been symbolical to be rational, and had reference to some grand and universal object. What that was we learn from the proclamation of him who was sent to prepare the way of the Lord. "Behold," said the Baptist to the surrounding multitude, on the banks of

the Jordan, "behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!" John, i. 29. This was the true holocaust, of which that offered by Abel was a lively type; and thus was Christ in reality, with regard to the efficacy of his sacrifice and the faith of those who trusted in his righteousness only for their justification, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Rev. xiii. 8. It was in respect to this truth that the Lord said, "the blood of righteous Abel should come upon the Jews," because they rejected Him in whom this first martyr believed, "even the Mediator of the new covenant, and the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel." Let us therefore attend to the Divine word: "For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn from Him that speaketh from heaven." Heb. xii. 25.

JANUARY THE FOURTH.

THE DELUGE.

Genesis, viii. 22.—While the earth-remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease.

MANY were the advantages possessed by the antediluvians, of which their great longevity was one of the most considerable; as hereby they had the knowledge of the origin of things from the best source of information. The axis of the earth being perpendicular to the equator, contributed to the prolongation of life, by producing perpetual spring, and keeping the atmosphere constantly temperate, in every climate. Notwithstanding these benefits, and the institutes of religion, nothing can be conceived more black than the early history of society. From Adam to Noah,

one person only is mentioned as having been remarkable for the holiness of his life; "And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." This solitary instance of righteousness, though it does not imply the absolute want of virtue in all who died within that period, yet does show in strong terms the prodigious prevalence of moral evil, from the fall to the flood. That idolatry gained ground at an early period, may be inferred from the invention of those musical instruments which were in ordinary use for the celebration of the bacchanalian orgies, and the most lascivious rites of Paganism. These corrupt principles and manners at length spread their influence among the worshippers of the true God, who, "seeing that the daughters of men were fair, took them wives of all which they chose." Where all order was inverted, the distinctions of families could no longer be observed; and hence it is that the sacred historian closes the detail of generations before he describes this wickedness, which was so great "that the earth was corrupt before God." This depravity consisted also of open hostility to the Divine authority, in the practice of idolatrous festivities, most offensive to infinite purity. Such being the vitiated character of mankind, it is not to be wondered at that the earth was filled with violence; for, when every individual acknowledged no other law than his own will, what could be the result but the oppression of the weak, amidst the contests of the powerful? When the cup of their iniquity was full, the destruction of these offenders became necessary in the moral order of things. But as this state of the earth was to be succeeded by another, the only righteous man, in this generation, was directed to construct an ark, for the preservation of himself and his family, with the proper stock of animals necessary for the supply of the new world. That this laborious preparation was observed by the contemporaries of the patriarch, cannot

be doubted ; but, instead of producing any reformation, they continued in the same course of vice and infidelity to the day when Noah entered the ark. This is a true picture of unbelievers in every age, and of sinners in every condition. They treat the warnings of Providence with indifference, and despise those who are anxious to avoid the wrath to come, by attending to the invitation of the Redeemer ; “ Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee : hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.” *Is.* xxvi. 20. That the ark was typical of this refuge, we learn from the apostolical exposition of the patriarchal history : “ By faith Noah being warned of God, of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark, to the saving of his house ; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” *Heb.* xi. 7. The condemnation of the world, in this view, denotes that the faith of the righteous aggravates the guilt of the impenitent, hastens the day of visitation, and increases their punishment. The ark was long in building, and so long were the sinners of that age warned of their danger ; but they equally slighted the preaching and the example of Noah, till the day came when, his work being completed, he and his family entered the place of security, and the rest of mankind were utterly excluded. Thus even now the day of grace is long, but it has its limits ; and we are called upon to improve the season, while the long suffering of God calls us to repentance. Should the allurements of the world entice, and the persuasions of friendship invite us from the business of religious preparation, let the language of our Lord repel the temptation : “ I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day ; the night cometh when no man can work.” When the waters were abated, Noah betrayed no impatience to be released ; but waited

from sabbath to sabbath, till he received the Divine command to leave the ark, which he did on the first day of the week, and thus aptly figured the Messiah, who, "being put to death in the flesh, was quickened by the Spirit." 1 Pet. iii. 18. On the restoration of the world, the Almighty, in accepting the sacrifice of atonement, declared that he would no more smite every living thing, as he had done; but that, "while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease." Thus the constitution of nature became fixed by an immutable decree, and thus will it continue, exhibiting the regular vicissitudes of seasons, till "the angelic voice shall swear by Him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven and the things that therein are, and the earth and the things that therein are, and the sea and the things which are therein, that there shall be time no longer." Rev. x. 6.

JANUARY THE FIFTH.

CONFUSION OF TONGUES.

Genesis, xi. 8.—*So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence, upon the face of all the earth.*

FEW subjects have more engaged the attention of the learned than the origin of nations, with the diversity of languages and religions. The sacred history unites these points of inquiry, and explains them by one event, to which all the fragments of ancient time bear testimony. The faith of Noah was the same with that of Adam; language also remained in the same state, so long as that faith was preserved without any mixture, and men lived in obedience to the Divine government. But when Ham fell under the curse, he was separated from his brethren, and his descendants became "mighty ones in the earth;" an expression,

which denotes the utmost violence of character. They were indeed apostates and rebels, unrestrained by any reverence for the Deity, and wholly intent upon schemes of conquest. Under Nimrod, who is called "a mighty warrior against the Lord," they undertook an expedition from the east, and having seized upon the land of Shinar, which was the inheritance of Shem, they established there the seat of government. The principal object of their malice was the religion which continued to be professed in the other branches of Noah's family. To destroy this, and to overturn the decree which devoted the posterity of Ham to servitude, they subdued the people around them, instituted the worship of the heavenly bodies, and began to erect a lofty temple in honour of the sun. Knowing that dispersion would weaken their force, they devised the plan of erecting an extensive city, which should be the centre of their dominion, and the primary place of idolatrous resort. This project was founded in the principles of deep policy. But human wisdom frequently goes beyond the mark, and loses what might have been secured by fair and adequate means. These "children of men," as they are denominated to express their corrupt character, confederated against the true believers and their faith. "And they said, Let us make us a NAME," which in the original is, "Let us make us a SHĒM," implying that they intended to choose a leader, under whose guidance they might form a permanent establishment. Their Shem, therefore, was set up in opposition to the patriarch upon whom the blessing rested. This conspiracy was an endeavour to establish another name, as the object of worship, different from that which constituted the true religion. The scheme, however, proved abortive, owing to the confusion of ideas and diversity of opinions, which commonly attends the departure from truth. Though these apostates equally hated the patriarchal religion, they had no

common principles of their own, so that their sentiments soon began to clash, and their language to vary. In consequence of this disunion, they "left off to build the city, and were scattered abroad upon the face of all the earth." It seems that the discord began with the chiefs in this undertaking, who, contending among themselves about the work, separated with their respective partisans, and thereby effected what they had conspired to prevent. That Providence which turned their machinations into folly, contrived also to render the separation serviceable for the purpose of peopling the earth, and of transmitting down, through various channels, traditionary notices of the early history of man. But this narrative ought not to be dismissed without adverting to the gift of tongues, which was imparted to the disciples of Jesus, when they were assembled as the workmen employed to build the spiritual Zion. Hereby they were qualified to preach the Gospel to all nations, and in the power of the Spirit to gather the dispersion of the Gentiles, that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philip. ii. 10, 11.

JANUARY THE SIXTH.

THE CALL OF ABRAM.

Genesis, xii. 4.—*So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him.*

THE first visible means adopted to accomplish the promise of redemption, was in calling the Father of the Faithful, and making him the head of that peculiar people, to whom "should pertain the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and from among whom, as concerning the flesh, the Anointed One was to arise, who is God over all blessed for ever." Rom. ix. 5.

Through the whole history of this stupendous work of grace, as well in the various preparatory steps, as in the final accomplishment, we perceive the immediate operation of Heaven. In the disposition of causes and the choice of instruments, every thing is out of the ordinary course of things, and contrary to what the wisdom of man would have contrived, or his prudence have selected. Thus the call of Abram was delayed till the seventy-fifth year of his age; and then he received the strange injunction, to leave the land of his inheritance, his friends, and connexions, to go into an unknown country, relying upon a declaration, which at his time of life appeared impossible to be fulfilled. That he should become the head of a great nation, and thereby prove "a blessing to all the families of the earth," could not but excite astonishment in one who was childless, and in the vale of years; yet Abram, instead of shrinking from the command, and being staggered at the promise, gave instant proof of his obedience, by "departing, as the Lord had spoken unto him." A firm confidence in the immutability of the Divine word, was the principle which guided the patriarch in this arduous undertaking, and this finally carried him with glory to the end of his course. In the language of the Apostle, "By faith, Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place, which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and went out, not knowing whither he went." Heb. xii. 8. Being convinced, that both the precept and promise came from the Father of Lights, with whom is neither variableness nor shadow of turning; Abram arose, and without consulting flesh and blood, the advice of his friends, or the solicitations of his kindred, "he departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him." Thus he not only complied with the order of Heaven, but he regulated his conduct by its directions. The patriarch never thought of blending worldly interests with religious obedience; or of regarding per-

sonal convenience, when called upon to discharge an express duty. He relied with implicit confidence upon the truth of the promise, and therefore he followed the Divine instruction in the whole of his proceeding, when he quitted the country, where his friends were many and his possessions considerable, for one in which he had neither acquaintance nor a foot of land that he could call his own. In this manner did the great patriarch, who had chosen to be the instrument of Divine mercy, become an example to believers of unshaken faith and of holy submission. Like him they also are called upon to "renounce the world, to sojourn as strangers and pilgrims on earth, having no continuing city or abiding place of rest here, but seeking one to come, even a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Whatever be their situation, or under what trials soever they may be placed in the course of Providence, they must not only submit with cheerful resignation, but exactly follow the rule laid down in the word of God: "This is the way, walk ye in it." The patriarch, after leaving Chaldea, led indeed a wandering life; but his footsteps were guided by the Divine direction, and at every resting-place he set up an altar, where he "called on the name of the Lord, even the everlasting God."

JANUARY THE SEVENTH.

THE CHOICE OF LOT.

Genesis, xiii. 12.—*Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.*

THE man who takes the Divine counsel in the choice of his situation in life, and abides by it as his constant rule, will pursue his course with safety, and finish it with joy. Though his difficulties may be many and

his prospects gloomy, he has this consolation, that "all things work together for good to those who love God." Of this great truth, upon the consideration of which so much depends, the history of Abram affords many instances. On receiving the command to leave his country, he neither murmured against the injunction, nor hesitated in his compliance. "And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot, his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came." Here the consequence of putting his trust in God became apparent, in the prosperity of his family: "And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold." But his mind was not contracted by the cares of wealth, nor did he feel any uneasiness at the success of his kinsman, - who "also had flocks, and herds, and tents." Domestic disquietudes, however, will arise as families enlarge and possessions multiply. Happy will it be for those to whom such trials happen, if they govern their tempers, and make personal sacrifices for the sake of peace, as Abram did, when "there was strife between the herdsmen of his cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle." Whether these feuds extended beyond the servants is not told, though it is implied in the language of Abram to his nephew: "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, for we are brethren." To preserve friendship and maintain the tranquillity of his household, the good man made the proposal of a separation; and that it might not appear to proceed from any selfish motives, he gave the choice of settlement to Lot. "If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right: or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."

To the liberality of Abram, the spirit of Lot formed a striking contrast. Instead of profiting by

an example, with which he had been so long familiar, Lot made every consideration yield to present convenience and earthly enjoyments. The generous offer of Abram operating upon his narrow mind, made him anxious to obtain the best portion of the land, without any regard to the comfort of his relation. The richness of the soil, the abundance of water, and a luxuriant vegetation, presented objects of superior attraction, which rendered him indifferent to every thing else. The dangers attending idolatrous connexions were held as nothing, provided sense could be gratified and wealth secured. The pious Abram carefully shunned such societies, and, to keep himself from them, he dwelt in the open country of Canaan. Lot, on the contrary, chose to reside near the wicked cities of the plain, and he pitched his tent toward Sodom, the most depraved of them all. At first he only took up his abode in the neighbourhood of that city; but familiarity with sinners soon weakens the hatred of their crimes. Lot in no long time fixed his dwelling in Sodom itself; and though he fell not into the abominations which brought down the vengeance of Heaven upon that place, his family suffered from their acquaintance with its iniquities. Even Lot lingered when the angels delayed the stroke of vengeance till his escape; and his wife, by her disobedience, became a memorial to all generations.

From this awful instance of the danger attending an imprudent choice of situation and connexions, we may learn the necessity of guarding against the first approaches of sin, by restraining our desires within the bounds of moderation, and by attending closely to the counsel of sacred wisdom; "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Prov. iv. 23.

JANUARY THE EIGHTH.

ABRAM'S REWARD.

Genesis, xv. i.—*After these things, the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.*

No man ever sought the Lord in vain, or trusted in the shadow of his wings, and was disappointed. To the eye of sense, the renunciation of pleasure, on the principle of conscience, may appear at variance with the dictates of nature, and the carnal mind will condemn the sacrifice of worldly interests, as contrary to sound policy. But in the end it will be seen, that “the way of the rash and froward becomes perplexed with thorns and snares; while humility and the fear of the Lord bring riches, and honour, and life.” Prov. xxii. 4. By giving the preference to sensual objects, Lot fell into many errors, and became the head of two families, so impure, that none belonging to them were to be admitted into the congregation of the Lord, to the tenth generation. The path of Abram, on the other hand, became as the steady “light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” He had a nearer communion with the Almighty, and more enlarged views of that blessing which was to distinguish him as the father of a spiritual seed, equal in multitude to the dust of the earth, and glorious as the stars of heaven. His temporal power also increased, and his name became famous among the neighbouring tribes, who were indebted to him for their deliverance from a potent enemy. The wicked sometimes owe their prosperity to virtues which they despise, and are saved from destruction by the righteous, whom they persecute. The residence of Lot in Sodom, injurious as it was to himself, proved advantageous to the in-

habitants. After the defeat of the tributary princes by the king of Elam, that monarch took vengeance on their subjects, by carrying them into captivity; and Lot shared in the general calamity. When Abram heard of the misfortune of his kinsman, he armed his servants, and hastening in pursuit of the invaders, obtained over them a speedy victory, and recovered the prisoners, together with the plunder. The liberality of Abram, in refusing any part of the spoils, could not fail to raise him in the estimation of the surrounding chiefs; but to him the benediction of "Melchizedeck, king of Salem, and priest of the Most High God," was far more acceptable than the glories of a triumph, or the grateful applause of delivered nations.

But a more exalted distinction awaited him; for "after these things the WORD of the LORD came unto him in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." This was a different manifestation from any with which he had been before favoured. The WORD OF THE LORD is described as coming unto Abram, and though in a vision, yet with such an awful display of the Divine glory, that it was necessary to prepare the faculties of the patriarch for the visitation. This WORD was something more than a mere audible sound; for of that Abram could not have been afraid, considering the many promises which had been so often made to him, and the particular injunctions of Heaven, by which his conduct was expressly guided. But in the present instance, a Divine personage comes to him, in the splendour of majesty, and thus describes his quality: "I am thy SHIELD and thy exceeding GREAT REWARD." This declaration comprehended two things—the present security of Abram, as his shield or encloser, and that great but future blessing, which constituted the object of his faith. The ancient Jewish church always understood that the WORD, or JEHOVAH, WAS the same

with the expected MESSIAH, and REDEEMER. This vision, therefore, was a manifestation to Abram "of that divine Person, who, in the fulness of time, became flesh and dwelt among men, full of grace and truth." John, i. 14.

JANUARY THE NINTH.

INSTITUTION OF CIRCUMCISION.

Genesis, xvii. 26.—*In the self-same day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son.*

THE history of Abraham is a typical representation of the great mystery of redemption; and, without considering it in this view, all the circumstances and institutions, by which it was distinguished, will appear dark and perplexed, repugnant to the feelings of nature, and inconsistent with infinite wisdom and justice. When he was ninety years old and nine, his name was enlarged by the insertion of part of the ineffable name of Jéhovah, and at the same time circumcision was established, as the seal of this covenant, by which the Almighty engaged to raise up a spiritual seed, of whom Abraham was the representative. He is therefore called the father of believers; and as Ishmael was circumcised with him, and all the men of his household, whether natives or strangers, the family of the patriarch was a figure of the church, in the communion of which "there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female," in the way of spiritual distinction; "but all are one in Christ Jesus. If, therefore, we are in Christ, then are we the seed of Abraham; and heirs according to the promise." Gal. iii. 9, 29.

Isaac was not yet born; but his name, signifying gladness, was now given, thereby implying that the painful services of the law were only intended as a preparation for that day, when it should be said,

“ Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” Is. xxv. 9. Even the injunction to circumcise every male child at the age of eight days, must have had some secret intention and particular signification. By fixing the limited number of days so exactly, the duration of the rite was implied, and some event indicated when it should yield to another dispensation. What was really figured under all these circumstances, will not be difficult to ascertain, if we attend to the true meaning of the word rendered *establish* in this narrative, but which in truth signifies to *raise up*, as from the state of death. By raising up the covenant then is to be understood, the restoration of man from the ruin of the fall; or the purification of his nature, and his redemption from sin and death. The seal of the covenant represented the spiritual perfection, which believers have “ in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; being buried with him in baptism, wherein also they are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.” Col. ii. 11, 12. The period of eight days determined the continuance of the institution in the circumstance to which it pointed, even the resurrection of the Messiah, on the first day of the week, or the great octave, when all the types and ordinances were to flee away like the shadows of the night before the Sun of Righteousness. By this triumph of grace over the powers of darkness, the rite of circumcision yielded to a more complete and comprehensive sacrament, in which we receive what the former indicated. When the Saviour had finished his wonderful course of humiliation, and was about to ascend from the scene of trial and victory, he left this commission to his disciples, “ Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the

Holy Ghost ; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you ; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

JANUARY THE TENTH.

ABRAHAM'S INTERCESSION.

Genesis, xviii. 32.—*And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.*

THAT the Divine justice should be delayed, through the intercession of man, appears to some reasoners derogatory to the idea of infinite wisdom. Hence they assert, that all addresses to the Deity should be general, without reference to circumstances or persons ; while others, extending this irreligious notion to the utmost verge of impiety, object to all prayer as needless, and even to its very principle as selfish. Supposing that the Almighty has any determinate plan for the government of the universe, it is pretended, that his granting the petitions of individuals would impede his operations and frustrate his general purpose. It is sufficient to refute this sophistry, by saying, that prayer comes within the description of means appointed for the moral order of the world. The Almighty could indeed govern the whole without it, and he might also cause every good to spring forth spontaneously out of the ground, without putting man under the necessity of labouring in its cultivation. But the Author of our being has placed us in such a condition, that work is necessary for the sustenance of the body ; and our minds are so constituted, that prayer is equally essential to our moral improvement. Though it would be presumptuous to ask for any change in the course of nature, or the suspension of ordinary causes in favour of man ; yet is it incumbent upon him to pray for the pardon

of his offences, and to supplicate an increase of grace, by which he may be guided to glory. He ought also to pray for temporal good, as an acknowledgement of his dependence upon the Divine bounty. And if this be the duty which he owes to himself, the principle applies to him with equal force, as the member of society. Linked to other beings of the same nature, he is required to promote their happiness, in doing which he advances his own, and thus contributes to the harmony of creation. Hereby his mind becomes enlarged and his knowledge is increased, the passions are regulated, and benevolence is kept in constant exercise, while the spirit of humility makes man cautious in his conduct, and faith directs him continually for strength to the Source of Perfection. "The fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much," James, v. 16; but in what way and to what extent, he cannot possibly know at the time when his intercession is offered; though this ignorance would be no more an excuse for his omission of the duty, than it would be for a husbandman, who, after tillage, should neglect his land, because he cannot tell what it may produce. The guilt of those for whom we intercede, so far from restraining the ardour of devotion, ought to quicken it, since the greater is the want, the more necessity there is for exertion. If the community to which the believer belongs is exceedingly sinful, his earnest prayer may be the more availing on account of the singularity of the example by which it is accompanied; and though he should not succeed in promoting a general reformation, he will at least improve himself, and be better prepared for the hour of visitation.

But the spirit of prayer must rise even beyond this, and go forth in the fervour of love, on the behalf of all who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. It is not enough to feel for those who are allied to us, by particular ties of country, friendship, or blood

The whole rational creation is the family to which we belong, and has a powerful claim upon our affection. It should therefore be our prayer, that "the knowledge of the Lord may speedily cover the whole earth, as the waters cover the depths of the sea."

The patriarch was actuated by this benevolent spirit when he stood before the Lord, and heard the awful judgment of destruction pronounced against Sodom. In his desire to save the devoted city, he ventured to approach near to the Divine presence, and he offered his supplications with earnestness. There is a holy boldness, which is no less acceptable to God than the humiliation which keeps the penitent "afar off." Abraham, on this occasion, confessed that he was but dust and ashes, yet he pleaded with fervour, and repeated his intercessions, both for the righteous and the wicked. His benevolence was not confined within a particular circle, nor his sympathy attracted to individuals. He remembered the righteous, it is true, but he could have prayed for their deliverance, without interposing his entreaties on behalf of the whole nation. Abraham felt compassion for the sinners of Sodom, and therefore he prayed that even they might be spared for the sake of the righteous. To this request the answer would have been sufficient, that the iniquity of Sodom was complete, that the continuance of such offenders could not be allowed without injury to the general system; and that, consequently, their excision was an act of mercy to the rest of mankind. Though this would have been a full vindication of the Divine proceedings, the Almighty condescended to grant the petitions of his servant, till he brought the number of righteous persons from fifty to ten; "And he said, Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once, peradventure ten shall be found there: and he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake." Thus, if the history encourages us to make "earnest

applications for all men ;" it teaches us also to submit the whole with an entire resignation to the direction of Infinite Wisdom, who knows best what to grant and what to refuse, and who always executes judgment in mercy.

JANUARY THE ELEVENTH.

ABRAHAM'S SACRIFICE.

Genesis, xxii. 14.—*And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh ; as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.*

THE most extraordinary circumstance in the life of Abraham, is the command which he received to sacrifice the son of his old age and the heir of the promise. If the injunction excites astonishment, the ready obedience of the patriarch fills the mind with admiration. When his earthly trials and hopes seemed to have reached their termination, and to be centred in him whose virtue and happiness alone remained to be desired, Abraham was suddenly called upon to resign his child, not by any ordinary providence, but as "a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains in the land of Moriah." Had Isaac fallen into an untimely grave, by some sudden stroke, or a painful disease, the venerable patriarch, like another holy sufferer, would have bowed before the dispensation, and said, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Job, i. 21. But Isaac must be a holocaust, and his father the priest. Yet Abraham neither murmured at the order, nor hesitated in making preparations for the journey. So far, indeed, was he from doubting the command, or delaying the performance, that "he rose early in the morning,

saddled his ass, and clave the wood for a burnt-offering." It appears from the narrative, that this visitation was in the night; but dreadful as the terms of the direction seem, we find the patriarch rising early, and providing all things as for a sacrifice of thanksgiving.* The ascent of Abraham, bearing the sacrificial instruments, and Isaac carrying the wood for his funeral pile, with the incidents which followed, altogether present a scene so peculiar, that, without the key of evangelical history, it is impossible to account for any part of the transaction. That the Almighty should expressly order a human sacrifice, which was always an abomination in his sight, is one of those difficulties which cannot be solved, without admitting some mysterious design in the command, and allowing that every circumstance of the history had some typical allusion to a future event. Yet no such explanation appears in any part of those writings which are regarded by the Jews. It concerns that people, therefore, to clear up this history, and to justify both the mandate itself, and the conduct of their great progenitor, upon the principles of their own religion, and consistently with the general notion of the Divine rectitude. Happily for the believers of the Gospel, they are at no loss for the illustration, since Calvary, which was part of this very mountain, if not the precise spot, exhibited, at the distance of about two thousand years, the entire scene, fulfilled to the utmost extent of literal exactness. Isaac, carrying the wood upon which he was to be laid, represented the Redeemer; first bearing his cross, and afterwards suspended upon it, as the real victim, or "Lamb of God, taking away the sins of the world." There is something very observable in the conduct of Abraham and his son, throughout the whole of this affecting business. On the one side, we find alacrity and resolution to execute what he was ordered; on the other, entire patience and silent submission. Who

does not see painted here in lively colours the supreme goodness of the Eternal Father, in freely giving up his beloved Son for us all, that we might obtain salvation through his blood? And in like manner, when we contemplate the resignation of Isaac to the will of his parent and the command of Heaven, are not our thoughts carried forward to the suffering Saviour in the garden, saying, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done?" But the parallel extends yet farther than even to the awful scene upon the mount, where Isaac lay ready to be slaughtered, and to that when Jesus, by the extraordinary circumstances of his death, drew from the Roman centurion the remarkable confession, "Truly, this was the Son of God." Isaac, from the time when the sentence was issued against him to the moment in which the word of God stayed the hand of Abraham, may be justly considered as in the state of the dead. His restoration to life and liberty on the third day after leaving his paternal habitation, corresponded so exactly with the interval between the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ, that the coincidence cannot be considered as casual, by anyone who admits the truth of the Mosaic history. The death of Jesus, and the declaration of his followers, that he rose from the dead on the third day, are facts universally known; now it was utterly impossible that the history of Isaac could have been fabricated to introduce that of Jesus, or the crucifixion and resurrection of the Founder of our religion, contrived to form a parallel with the extraordinary event, which occurred so many ages before, in Mount Moriah. Most aptly, therefore, did the patriarch, after offering the appointed ram instead of his son, call the name of the place "Jehovah-jireh, as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen;" or rather, as the passage should have been rendered: "In this mount the

LORD SHALL BE SEEN." And he was seen there in that day, when, notwithstanding all the agony of the suffering humanity, the Divine nature broke forth amidst the tremendous scene of darkness, and proclaimed aloud the accomplishment of the typical and prophetic volume, which for so many ages had exercised the faith of the righteous—"It is FINISHED!"

JANUARY THE TWELFTH.

THE MEDITATION OF ISAAC.

Genesis, xxiv. 63.—*And Isaac went out to meditate in the field, at the even-tide.*

THERE are times when retirement from the world is necessary to the proper discharge of the social duties. The man who devotes all his hours to business or amusement, will fall into errors for want of deliberation, and into difficulties which might have been avoided by the deliberate exercise of his judgment. In every pursuit, occasional abstraction from other objects is requisite to the right understanding of its principles, and to the accurate application of those rules which are essential to improvement in the practice. What is of so much importance in science, cannot be of less in the concern of human happiness. Every day is a new life, which man must employ according to the instruction afforded by the seasons that are past, and with a steady regard to what may succeed. His meditation, therefore, to be profitable, must be daily; taking in review the actions in which he has been engaged, and the returns he has made for blessings received. By this means the temper will be easily restrained within the limits of prudence, the path of duty becomes plain, and whatever im-

perfections may remain to be corrected, they will, under this course of self-examination, be lessened every day.

The incident recorded of the patriarch points out, in the most instructive light, the mode and time for this exercise: "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field, at the even-tide." Society has various claims upon us, the neglect of which would be a disregard of the great ends of our being. But as the present state is only preparatory to another, we must, at proper opportunities, withdraw from those allurements which have any tendency to make us forgetful of our heavenly inheritance. It is not enough that our friendships are virtuous and our conversation innocent; we have another intercourse to maintain, and lessons of importance to learn, which can only be attained by the cultivation of a devotional spirit. Isaac went out for the purpose of meditation, and it is evident that this was his stated practice. Righteousness dwelt in the tents of Abraham; yet Isaac went out from thence, that he might meditate apart from human observation. The original word by which the piety of Isaac is expressed, signifies to meditate on the **BRANCH**, an obvious allusion to that object, in whom all believers have trusted as well under the patriarchal dispensation as in every succeeding age. This meditation was therefore animated by faith, and sanctified by prayer. The true Branch, who is the Lord our Righteousness, gave life to the spiritual desires of Isaac, and thus "Faith was to him, the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." His contemplations were not merely speculative, but accompanied by prayer, or they were, what the language denotes, the shootings forth of his heart, in aspirations, to the Fountain of eternal life. The surrounding scenery, instead of diverting his mind, contributed to enlarge his views of the Divine benevolence, to compose his thoughts and direct them

upwards to the great Object of his affections. To the spiritual mind, the works of creation afford lessons of instruction, even in matters appertaining to the kingdom of God. While the order of times and seasons indicates the successions of being, the hidden operations of nature serve to illustrate the wonders of grace. If the heathens were without excuse for abusing the knowledge of the Deity, which they might have obtained from his works, we, who possess the advantages of revelation, must be far more culpable, in beholding the beauties of nature without any regard to the sublime objects which they represent. The Apostle has taught us a different lesson: "The invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." Of these invisible things, Isaac had a foretaste, and they constituted his support and delight in the course of his pilgrimage. It was his daily practice to meditate thereon, and in the field of nature he beheld the wonders of redemption. The time chosen for this retirement was the most proper for combining reflection and devotion with inquiry and contemplation. In the midst of employment it is difficult to bring the mind into a state of tranquil consideration. Isaac, therefore, set apart the even-tide as the regular season for devout attention to the works of God in nature and grace. The even-tide marks the termination of another period in our being; no time therefore can be more proper to review the incidents which have occurred in that space, while the remembrance of them is yet fresh, and any errors connected with them may be retrieved or corrected. Let every one then imitate the practice of Isaac, which is equally conducive to the health of the body and the welfare of the soul; which strengthens the corporeal faculties, keeps the passions in subjection, and elevates the mind above the world. Amusements may dispel momentary cares, but habitual contempla-

tion and retirement will prove a constant security against them, as by this watchfulness over our hearts we shall be constantly enabled to resist the temptations by which we are surrounded. Let us then "go out with the patriarch into the field, and meditate at the even-tide;" and, when we cannot do this, let us "stand in awe, and sin not; commune with our own hearts, and in our chambers, and be still."

JANUARY THE THIRTEENTH.

THE APOSTACY OF ESAU.

Genesis, xxvi. 34, 35.—*And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith, the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Tchemath, the daughter of Elon the Hittite; which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and Rebekah.*

THE man who entertains light notions of religion, will pay little regard to the ordinary duties of life: his connexions are formed without inquiry, and his pursuits guided by the sensual appetite. Having chosen the world as his portion, he looks for no higher enjoyments than what it affords; and his associates are licentious, because he cannot endure the restraint of virtue, nor submit to the dictates of superior wisdom. A remarkable instance of this occurred in the family of Isaac, whose elder born, Esau, was, in the scriptural phrase, "a cunning hunter and a man of the field." On looking forward into the history of Esau, we find him a considerable potentate, standing at the head of formidable tribes in the land of Canaan. With this clue to his character, we are enabled to account for the circumstances which occasioned his rejection, and the transfer of the blessing to the line of Jacob.

Abraham, in his various removals, always set up an altar where he pitched his tent, and he carefully avoided any mixture with the nations among whom he sojourned.

In all this Isaac followed the example of his father, and without doubt he inculcated the same principle of separation on his children, by explaining the peculiar privilege which kept them apart from the rest of the world. But the bold and enterprising spirit of Esau disdained this tranquil life, and despised the Divine authority. Instead of being what the patriarchal office required, a man of peace, his delight was in the work of destruction. Aiming at the establishment of an earthly dominion, he slighted the promise which was inherent in his family. Esau was not simply a hunter in the ordinary acceptation of the term, for in that character were united, in those early ages, the destroyer of beasts and the oppressor of men; whence it is that one of the oldest Jewish commentators calls him, a slayer of souls. Jacob, on the contrary, contented himself with living after the manner of his fathers, as a stranger and pilgrim upon earth. The translators have weakened the force of the contrast, and done injustice to Jacob, by calling him a *placid* instead of a *perfect* man, which is the exact meaning of the Hebrew appellation. This perfection of Jacob being opposed to the temper of his brother, shows, that the cunning by which Esau was distinguished, and the pursuits in which he delighted, were condemned by the only proper judge of their respective characters. The manner in which Jacob obtained the primogeniture and the blessing, has been treated with virulence by infidels; and even some pious writers have passed an indiscreet censure on his conduct, without duly considering the circumstances of the case, and the impropriety of applying to it the common rules of action. Human things, as such, must certainly be judged by the common principles

which unite men together ; but those which are divine must be regarded with reference to their own nature, and the end of their appointment. As the patriarchal blessing was a spiritual and not a secular concern ; it neither conferred power nor conveyed any earthly possession to the person upon whom it rested. When, therefore, Jacob purchased the inheritance of his brother, so far from gaining any temporal advantage over him, he only procured what Esau despised. Their subsequent conditions indeed were such, that to the eye of sense it would seem as if the blessing remained with Esau ; for while he was fixed in the bosom of a prosperous family, in the most fertile parts of Canaan ; Jacob resided many years in a state of vexatious servitude, after which he wandered about from place to place, and lastly he closed his eyes in a strange land.

But each possessed what he had chosen for himself, with the necessary consequences resulting from the contract made between them. Esau enjoyed the gratification of his appetite, and the power and riches of this world ; while Jacob was contented with the spiritual inheritance. In all this there was no compulsion laid upon the human will, consequently no complaint could be justly made by either of the parties. The transfer of the hereditary right was freely made by Esau, who, from that moment, could lay no claim to the patriarchal succession, without mockery of God and injury to his brother. He was guilty of apostacy in abjuring the blessing, by a solemn imprecation, and by assigning the love of the flesh as his reason for the act ; “ Lo, I am at the point to die, what good will this birthright do to me ? ”

The deception passed upon Isaac prevented him from committing a greater mischief ; and though, to appearance, Jacob was guilty of imposition, he was properly what he called himself, for his brother was no longer in the legal sense the first born, and there-

fore not the heir of promise, since the hereditary order was reversed, and the blessing descended with it of course. The behaviour of Esau, after his apostasy, ought to have made Isaac cautious how he committed the sacred trust which he possessed, to one who was utterly unworthy of the blessing. "And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith, the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath, the daughter of Elon the Hittite, who were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah." Thus did Esau not only despise his birthright, but he showed, by his alliance with idolaters, that he was totally unworthy of the blessing.

JANUARY THE FOURTEENTH.

JACOB'S VISION.

Genesis, xxviii. 16, 17.—*And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.*

To him who is under the guidance of the Almighty, the desert will blossom like Paradise, and every part of the earth will be his home. In the absence of temporal comforts, he finds those which are spiritual, and the want of worldly friends is more than compensated by communion with the Father of Spirits. During the abode of Jacob with his parents, we do not read of any Divine communications with which he was favoured; but when he became an obedient exile, the glory of the Lord was manifested unto him, and, with the confirmation of the promise, he obtained a view of the mystery of redemption. Though the inheritor of the patriarchal dignity, and invested with the right of succession, yet, to preserve the tranquillity of his family, he yielded up the worldly possessions

to his brother, and became a wanderer upon the earth, with nothing but his staff.

In this journey "he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night;" so that, like the Saviour of the world, he might say, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, yet the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." The spot was desolate, and he could find nothing better for his comfort than the stones, which seem to have attracted his notice. But that the resting-place of Jacob was more remarkable than he was aware when he came to it, appears from the observation he made after the vision: "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." From its situation, between Beersheba and Haran, it seems to have been the identical BETH-EL, where Abraham was favoured with the Divine presence, on his entrance into Canaan, and the very stones which Jacob found were probably the remains of the altar erected by his great progenitor. Upon these rude but sacred fragments did Jacob repose, and here was exemplified that description of the Divine intercourse with the human spirit, given in another part of Holy Writ; "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed, then God openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction." Job, xxxiii. 15, 16.

Nothing can be conceived more sublime than the view of the celestial world, now exhibited to the inward sense of the sleeping patriarch. "Behold, a ladder stood upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac; the land whereton thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed." Most commentators have mistaken the meaning of this representation, by adopting the exposition of a

Jewish doctor, who has described the whole as nothing more than an image of Providence. According to him, the ascending and descending of the angels denoted the incessant activity of those glorious beings, who are the guardians of the just, and continually employed in their service. But the doctrine of Providence could not have been unknown to Jacob; nor was he unacquainted with the ministration of angels, since the history of his family afforded such memorable instances of their power and appearance. This vision then must have had some other intention than that of applying such familiar truths as these to the mind of the patriarch. What the emblem really signified we learn from an unerring expositor: after the conversion of Nathaniel, who acknowledged Jesus to be the Son of God and the King of Israel, our Lord said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending, upon the Son of Man." John, i. 51. The language of the new disciple corresponded with the creed of the Jewish church, which uniformly held the Messiah to be the Son of God, who appeared unto the patriarchs. The reply to this ascription confirmed that belief; and our Lord, by an allusion to the vision of Jacob, resolved the mystery which it contained into his own voluntary humiliation and triumphant exaltation. The steps in this ladder, which united heaven and earth, shadowed forth those dispensations of grace, which the Apostle thus enumerates: "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh—justified in the Spirit—seen of angels—preached unto the Gentiles—believed on in the world—received up into glory." 1 Tim. iii. 16. Throughout this great "mystery of reconciliation," as the same Apostle elsewhere calls the redemption by Christ, the ministry of the celestial spirits was eminently conspicuous. One of the highest in the angelical order announced the in-

carnation to the holy Virgin; a host of them communicated the glad tidings of the Saviour's birth to the shepherds of Bethlehem; heaven was opened at his baptism; angels ministered unto him after his temptation, and again in his agony; the resurrection was witnessed and revealed by them unto the pious women; and, finally, at the ascension of the Messiah, his triumph was attended by the hierarchies of heaven, when, in the language of the Psalmist, it might be said, "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." Psal. lxxviii. 17, 18.

JANUARY THE FIFTEENTH.

JACOB'S PROSPERITY.

Genesis, xxx. 43.—*And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maid-servants, and men-servants, and camels, and asses.*

THOUGH temporal prosperity ought not to be considered as any peculiar mark of the Divine favour, because riches are frequently a snare, and adversity often a real blessing; yet human industry and ingenuity, properly employed, are means appointed for conveying the blessings of Providence. It is a duty incumbent upon all men to employ their time and talents with the view of making provision for the support of their families. But this must be regulated by the principle of righteousness, and constantly bounded within the limits of moderation. An inordinate desire to multiply worldly goods, not only

increases by enjoyment, but produces unthankfulness to God, and uncharitableness to men. And, as this propensity to gain riches always begets anxiety, fear, and envy; so the cunning craftiness induced by it will frequently be deceived, and disappointed in its attempts to impose upon the unwary.

We have a remarkable exhibition of an avaricious spirit in the conduct of Laban, who at first received his nephew with apparent kindness, and made him an offer of wages for his service; but no sooner did he discover the affection of Jacob for Rachel, than he resolved to turn the circumstance to his own interest, even at the expense of his children's happiness. When the seven years were expired, for which period Jacob had contracted, Laban imposed Leah upon him, under the pretence that it was against the custom of the country to give the younger daughter in marriage before the elder. Now an upright man would have mentioned this usage when the proposal was first made to him; and not have misled even a stranger in so tender a concern. But Jacob appears to have been purposely kept ignorant of this custom, till the fraud was completed, which Laban had originally in view. From the manner in which this excuse was made, and the offer of Laban to give Rachel also for the service of another seven years; it is evident that he had not such a scrupulous regard to the rule of equity, or that respect for the established customs of his country, which he affected. His object was to avail himself of the skill and industry of his kinsman, and this appeared more clearly in Laban's confession, when Jacob requested leave to depart, after the expiration of the second period of servitude. "And Laban said, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry; for I have learned by experience, that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake." This declaration must be attentively considered in reading the narrative, as it furnishes a com-

plete clue to the character of Laban, and is an ample vindication of the course adopted by Jacob to obtain that remuneration to which he was entitled. Now a man of Laban's disposition would hardly have made this acknowledgement, if he had not been sensible that the increase of his estate was owing to Jacob. In confessing this truth, therefore, he condemned himself, and consequently he had no reason to complain, when, by a fair contract, Jacob availed himself of his superior knowledge in the secrets of nature, to provide an adequate maintenance for his household. That sagacity had hitherto been wholly devoted to the benefit of Laban, who, finding it so profitable, wished to keep Jacob in a constant state of dependance, to prevent him from returning to his paternal habitation. Hence it was that he deprived his daughters of their portions, and so frequently changed the wages of Jacob. By the last agreement, the miser thought he had gained all that he could wish; for, in his reply to the proposal of Jacob, he eagerly exclaimed, "Behold, I would it might be according to thy word," thereby indicating his desire to close the bargain upon the terms which had been stated, and which seemed to Laban favourable only to himself.

Whatever may be understood of the means adopted by Jacob to enlarge his store, no injustice was thereby done to Laban, neither did he bring any such charge, when he had the proper opportunity for so doing, and when the reproaches of his son-in-law might have warranted the recrimination if it had been just. Whether Jacob, in the management of the cattle, acted by the force of his genius, and from experience, or was guided by some secret impulse, does not appear, neither is the inquiry necessary to the vindication of his character. If it be unjust so to apply the superiority of intellect as to make it advantageous to our temporal concerns, it will be difficult to acquit

those whom we are accustomed to venerate for their virtues, and to admire for their wisdom, of intentional wrong. The information which Jacob had acquired was the result of many years of painful privation and laborious service. The profits of that time and labour went to enrich the coffers of his greedy employer; but the practical knowledge which Jacob obtained, in the course of his employment, was exclusively his individual property. The last contract gave him a right to exercise this judgment solely to his own advantage; and without doing any injury to the flocks of Laban, he was justified in applying the skill which he possessed to the increase of his stock, according to the agreement. Laban, in cunning and duplicity, long proved an overmatch for his nephew; but at length the patient submission and persevering industry of Jacob received an ample recompense, while the man of craft was caught in the snare of his own devices.

JANUARY THE SIXTEENTH.

THE WRESTLING OF JACOB.

Genesis, xxxii. 30.—*And Jacob called the name of the place PENIEL: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.*

WHEN we read in the Gospel that “no one hath seen God at any time,” it might seem difficult to reconcile the assertion with the relations of the Divine appearance which occur in the patriarchal history. But if we attend to what the Evangelist says, we shall at once have a complete explanation of the supposed mystery, and direct evidence that the visible Deity of the early ages was no other than the incarnate Saviour, even “the only begotten Son, who is in the

bosom of the Father." John, i. 18. The JEHOVAH-ANGEL was the same divine person, who, in the fulness of time, became manifest in the flesh: for of him only can it be said that he "proceeded forth and came directly from God." The gradations of celestial intelligence are described as innumerable, and rising in an infinite variety of power, dignity, and knowledge; but the highest in the angelical orders are limited and dependent beings, the creatures of God, and the ministers of his pleasure. The JEHOVAH-ANGEL, on the contrary, has all the attributes of Divinity, and speaks and acts in his own name, and in the plenitude of supreme authority. This was the LORD who appeared unto Jacob, at Beth-el, but in that night-vision his person was above all the hierarchies of heaven, enveloped in the awfulness of Divine majesty, and proclaiming himself the "God of Abraham and of Isaac," assuring the wandering exile of his protection, and promising him the blessing of his fathers. On other occasions, when JEHOVAH assumed a bodily form, the official appellation of ANGEL is always given to him, and both names in conjunction indicate the essential Divinity joined to the humanity. In the return of Jacob to his own country, he was encountered at the close of day, when alone, by an extraordinary personage, who opposed his progress. Though in this conflict the patriarch prevailed, yet the divinity of his antagonist was made apparent, by his touching the thigh of Jacob, and causing him to halt. This circumstance, and the alteration of the name of Jacob to Israel, because he had power with God and prevailed, show that the whole scene was intended for a symbolical prophecy of some Divine person, and a victory which he should gain. Who this was will appear from the description of his person given by the Psalmist: "Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee

for ever. Gird thy sword upon thy THIGH, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty." Ps. xlv. 2, 3. Of his exploits we have an account in the Apocalypse, where he is called "The Word of God," and "he hath on his vesture, and on his thigh, a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." Rev. xvii. 13. 16. The prophet Hosea also has a striking allusion to this conflict of the patriarch: "Jacob, by his strength, had power with God: yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with him, even the Lord God of hosts; the Lord is his memorial. Therefore turn thou to thy God, keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually." Ch. xii. 3. 6.

Now if any doubt could arise in reading the narrative, whether the person, with whom Jacob contended, was really the Deity in human form, it is answered by this comment, wherein the Jewish people are called upon to turn unto Jehovah, with whom their great ancestor had this singular interview. It also demonstrates, that the same Jehovah-Angel, who opposed Jacob at Peniel, was the Lord God who appeared to him at Beth-el. What kind of wrestling this was is not easy to conjecture, but that it called forth the most powerful exertions, and was maintained with vigilance and perseverance, is evident from the story; while, from the prophetic illustration, it is obvious that the mind was agitated equally with the body, and that Jacob overcame more by faith and prayer than by any outward exercise. He had left Canaan in obedience to the direction of his parents; and, after many vicissitudes, he was now on his return thither, at the command of the Almighty. But at this time he was in a state of great peril, being on the border of his brother's dominions, and having no reason to conclude that the resentment of Esau was abated. This mani-

festation of the Divine presence then was calculated to invigorate his faith, and to inspire him with comfort, while the blessing which followed the victory gave him assurance, that, as he had prevailed with God, he should overcome his enemies also; agreeable to the assertion of an Apocryphal writer: "When the righteous fled from his brother's wrath, wisdom guided him in right paths, and showed him the kingdom of God, and gave him knowledge of holy things, made him rich in his travels, and multiplied the fruit of his labours. In the covetousness of such as oppressed him, she stood by him, and made him rich: she defended him from his enemies, and kept him safe from those that lay in wait; and in a sore conflict she gave him the victory, that he might know that godliness is stronger than all." Wisd. x. 10. 13.

JANUARY THE SEVENTEENTH.

THE DEATH OF ISAAC.

Genesis, xxxv. 29.—*And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.*

THE long absence of Jacob from his father, especially after quitting Laban and becoming reconciled to Esau, appears very unaccountable, and, upon ordinary principles, would hardly be considered as favourable to his character. Above twenty years had he endured a hard service in Mesopotamia, where his family became large; and, notwithstanding the opposition which he experienced from the malignity of his kinsmen, his wealth increased abundantly, and, through the special interference of Providence, he came out of that country in safety. The same care

watched over him, and turned the dreaded interview with his brother into a meeting of peace. It might have been thought after this that Jacob would have hastened to the habitation of his father, instead of which, we find him erecting a house at Succoth, and purchasing an inheritance in Shechem. The last settlement, however, was attended with some unhappy circumstances; and though the patriarch set up an altar there to the God of Israel, he was called from thence, and, in obedience to the Divine command, he removed to Beth-el. Before this, Jacob caused all the superstitious images to be collected, that were in his family, and buried them under an oak; while, as an act of necessary preparation for their appearance in the holy place, he required his household, and all that were with him, to make themselves clean and to change their garments. From this circumstance it is obvious that the family of Jacob was polluted with idolatrous practices, and that he had not acted as became him in removing these vanities. But on being reminded of Beth-el, the patriarch became sensible of his error. His first step, therefore, was to collect the idols and to bury them; the next, to sanctify his family by lustration and the change of garments. In all this we see the spirit of repentance manifested, by an abhorrence of every thing offensive to the true God, an earnest desire to serve him with purity of heart, and of appearing at his altar in a state of sanctification. At Beth-el the patriarch was visited by another appearance of the Divine Majesty, with a renewal of the promise which he had received, on his way to Padan-aram. This was the direct course which he should have taken towards his paternal home, instead of deviating another way, and attempting to fix his abode, by the purchase of an estate near Shechem. That measure brought him into great trouble, by exposing him to the resentment of the surrounding tribes, on account of the treache-

rous cruelty committed by two of his sons. Thus was Jacob called from the spot which he had chosen for his abode, and obliged to depart for Beth-el, by the direction of God, who out of evil educes good, and frequently, by turning the devices of men against themselves, compels them to seek his face and live. The patriarch having made his offerings at Beth-el, and consecrated a pillar unto Jehovah, pursued his journey, and came unto Isaac his father.

The whole of this history can only be properly understood by considering the parties in their typical characters. As Isaac was the heir of promise, and the figure of the Redeemer; so Jacob stood the representative of the church. The long period of his exile denoted the distance of time between the issuing of the promise and its fulfilment. In his return the patriarch encountered many difficulties, owing to the pollutions of his family, and his wandering out of the direct way which led to his father's house. Herein he was an image of the church of Israel; as Esau his brother was of the Gentile world. But at length Jacob heard and obeyed the Divine call; when with a holy zeal he gathered all the abominations which defiled his household, and buried them under a tree, near Shechem. In like manner spiritual Israel, when returning unto the Lord, exclaims, "What have I to do any more with idols?" Which confession, followed by the removal of all iniquity, and burying every vain imagination under the cross, draws down the promise from above. "I have heard and observed him," says the Redeemer: "I am like a green fir-tree; from me is thy fruit found." Hos. xiv. 8. The purgation and change of raiment, enjoined by Jacob, indicated the washing of regeneration, and the clothing of righteousness, by which alone the church is rendered acceptable in the sight of God. Thus in the Apocalyptical description of the redeemed multitude, which no one could number,

it is said, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Rev. vii. 14. When Jacob had discharged his duty at Beth-el, he was conducted in safety to the residence of his father, in Hebron; soon after which the venerable "Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him." His death completed the reconciliation of his children; and when his spirit was gathered unto his people, he left peace also to his descendants. In this he represented the Redeemer, who is "the peace of Jew and Gentile, having made both one, by breaking down the middle wall of partition; and reconciling both unto God, in one body, by the cross, by which he hath slain the enmity, and preached peace to those who were at war off, and to them that were nigh." Ephes. ii. 13. 17.

JANUARY THE EIGHTEENTH.

JOSEPH IN PRISON.

Genesis, xxxix. 21.—*But the Lord was with Joseph.*

"THE works of Divine Providence, in this world, are full of windings and turnings, so that one thing seems to be doing, when in the main quite another thing is really intended*."

This observation of the philosopher is beautifully exemplified in the history of Joseph, the incidents of which are so curiously interwoven, that, while they form an admirable system, each part taken from the rest, and considered by itself, would appear, to human foresight, rather calculated to produce confusion than harmony, and to impede than advance the pro-

* Lord Bacon, *De Sapientia Veterum*.

sperity of its subject. Through the partiality of his father, Joseph became an object of hatred to his brethren; and his own vanity, in relating two remarkable dreams, served only to increase the domestic jealousy. Out of such feuds and disquietudes no observer would have anticipated good, either to the youth so imprudently indulged, or a family so bitterly divided. The artifice of Reuben to deliver his brother out of the hands of those who meditated his murder, served another purpose than that which the ingenuity of man would have contrived to bring Joseph to honour, for the preservation of his kindred. Avarice prevailed over cruelty, in this instance, and, by the counsel of Judah, the victim of their malice was sold for a slave. Though the life of Joseph was preserved, he had no other prospect than that of spending his days in a state of miserable servitude; as the Ishmaelites, who purchased him, were going to a country, the inhabitants of which held the Hebrews in abhorrence. A more cheering dawn, however, opened upon him, when he became the steward of Potiphar, an officer of high distinction in the Egyptian court. Here then, according to the speculations of human wisdom, Joseph was in the road to wealth at least, if not to preferment; the gratitude of his master being called upon to reward, in due course of time, the person to whose fidelity he was so greatly indebted for the increase of his estate. Even the partiality with which Joseph was regarded by his mistress would, in the estimation of worldly policy, have been a favourable occurrence towards obtaining his liberty, and for promoting any ambitious views by which he might be actuated. But the virtuous youth, instead of turning this circumstance to his advantage, resisted the blandishments by which he was daily allured, and repelled the vicious solicitation continually urged upon him, with fortitude; "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Religion was the fixed principle which regulated the actions of Joseph, who chose rather to endure the horrors of a dungeon than to enjoy the momentary pleasures of sin. That Potiphar should have been contented with the imprisonment of his servant, when he might have put him to death, can only be ascribed to that overruling Power, which sometimes by secret monitions restrains the wrath of man, and turns it into an occasion of praise. But though the life of Joseph was preserved, he suffered severe torments under the tyranny of his oppressor; for, according to the Psalmist, "his feet were hurt with fetters, and he was laid in iron." Ps. cv. 18. In this state of affliction, the cause of Joseph would have been abandoned by the most sagacious observer of moral and political causes; for the nature of the crime alleged against him, and the character of his persecutor, completely excluded every reasonable hope of his deliverance. "But the Lord was with Joseph," and therefore his exaltation was not conducted according to the devices of human wisdom, through the palace of Potiphar, but from the depth of the gloomy dungeon. His meekness and resignation softened the rigorous disposition of the keeper, who, at last, intrusted to his entire management the interior concerns of the prison. Very remarkable is the paraphrase of the Targumist upon this part of the history: "But the WORD of the LORD extended mercy and succour to Joseph, and gave him favour with the keeper; neither did he treat Joseph as other captives, because he perceived that there was no iniquity in him, since the WORD of the LORD was his helper." This exposition the ancient paraphrast seems to have taken in part from the account given of Joseph by the Psalmist, "the WORD of the LORD tried him," Ps. cv. 19: and thus another proof is afforded that JEHOVAH the WORD, who tried and supported the church of old, was no other than the

Messiah, "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Col. ii. 9.

While Joseph had the charge of the prison, an occurrence happened which might have warranted the assurance that his deliverance was nigh at hand. His interpretation of the dreams related by two officers belonging to the household of Pharaoh, must have impressed them, and all who heard it, with great admiration of such uncommon powers, while the modesty of the youth could not but affect them with pity for his suffering. Joseph himself considered the incident as affording an opportunity by which he might gain his liberty; for, after predicting the felicity of the butler, he said, "Think on me when it shall be well with thee; and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me; and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house, for indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon." The request was natural and just; but the Guardian of Joseph had more extensive views than could be promoted by the good offices of the butler at this time; and therefore what man would have regarded as a promising circumstance, passed away through the ingratitude of the courtier: "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him."

JANUARY THE NINETEENTH.

THE EXALTATION OF JOSEPH.

Genesis, xli. 46.—*And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

IF the station which Joseph obtained in the prison be considered, with the excellence of his character, it will appear that the chief butler was indebted to

him for more good offices than that of the exposition of his dream. This is evident from the concern expressed by Joseph, on perceiving the two officers in trouble, and the readiness with which he explained the causes of their disquietude. The ingratitude of the butler, therefore, was very great, since, from the relation in which he stood to Pharaoh, it was easy for him to have procured the release of the unfortunate stranger, as some return for repeated kindness. But the chief butler, on being restored to his office, no more remembered the gloomy prison, nor the request of the man who had dispelled its horrors. He was eager to banish all thoughts of his recent disgrace and danger, though in the fate of his companion he might have learned the uncertainty of royal favour, while in the conduct of Joseph he had a striking example of pure benevolence. But prosperity too frequently makes men unmindful of their original, insensible to the miseries of their fellow-creatures, and ungrateful to the Author of their mercies. The Prophet has a strong allusion to this incident, in his reproach of Israel: "They lay upon beds of ivory, and stretched themselves upon their couches, and did eat the lambs of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall: they chanted to the sound of the viol, and invented new instruments of music: they drank wine in bowls, and anointed themselves with the most costly ointments;" yet, amidst this profusion and luxury, they disregarded the poor and destitute; or, as it is here expressed, "they were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." Amos, vi. 4. 6. But the ways of Heaven are mysterious, and that which excites present grief and resentment may be the occasion of joy and thanksgiving. Had the chief butler discharged his duty, on being restored to his office, Joseph might have regained his liberty; but after cancelling the obligation, the officer most likely would have remembered him no more. At

the expiration of two years, the monarch also was troubled with some uncommon dreams, which confounded the skill of his wise men, "none of whom could interpret them unto Pharaoh." The singularity of the dreams, and the agitation of the sovereign, brought the chief butler to the recollection of his own case; and it is but justice to observe that his language was candid and his confession ingenuous. "Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day." Having acknowledged his error, he related what had happened to himself and the chief baker, the dreams interpreted by Joseph, and the manner in which they were verified. Upon this information the Hebrew servant was immediately brought into the royal presence, when he not only explained the twofold vision, but with great judgment and precision he advised what should be done to provide against the famine, thus symbolically represented. Well then might the astonished monarch say, "Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art. Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou."

Thus did Joseph rise, by the Divine direction, from the dungeon to the palace; instead of being a slave he became the second man in a mighty kingdom, "and the people bowed the knee before him." In the remarkable but expressive language of an Apocryphal writer, "When the righteous was old, wisdom forsook him not, but delivered him from sin: she went down with him into the pit: and left him not in bonds till she brought him the sceptre of the kingdom and power, against those that oppressed him." Wisdom, x. 13, 14.

JANUARY THE TWENTIETH.

JACOB'S COMPLAINT.

Genesis, xlii. 36.—All these things are against me.

No little is man acquainted with what is best for him, that, upon the slightest disappointment of his wishes; he begins to seek for some cause upon which to fasten the charge of a fault; and to regret that he had not adopted another course, by which the supposed misfortune might have been avoided. In the end, however, it appears that this very cross was designed for his advantage, and that without it he would have suffered a real calamity. Thus it was with Jacob, on being informed that the governor of Egypt had kept Simeon as a surety for the appearance of Benjamin. "Me have ye bereaved of my children," said the mourning patriarch; "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me."

Jacob certainly had little reason to be pleased with his elder sons; but in this instance he treated them unjustly, for, in relating the history of their family, to exculpate themselves from the charge of being spies, they acted with honest simplicity. The conduct of Joseph may indeed seem strange and capricious; but had he revealed himself at the first meeting, his brethren would probably have kept his greatness a secret, and avoided returning to Egypt, from the fear of experiencing his resentment. It was, besides, the wish of Joseph to try his brethren, that, by bringing them to repentance, he might secure their obedience, and thus be the better enabled to provide an asylum for them, under his immediate protection. Instead of being elevated in his own estimation, Joseph regarded his advancement solely as the act of Divine mercy, for the purpose of preserving lives. Such was the

pious conclusion of Joseph, amidst the splendour with which he was surrounded; while his afflicted parent, on reviewing the breaches made in his family, drew the gloomy inference, "that all these things were against him." But so far was this sentence from being just, that every link in the chain of imaginary evils was essential to the welfare of the patriarch. The whole indeed was the plan of Infinite Wisdom to prepare a place for the posterity of Israel, where they might be fitted to accomplish, in due time, the promise made unto their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thus every little incident contributes to the vast and complex scheme of Providence; and even that which occasions the pang of sorrow, and the bitter expression of complaint, proves the secret cause of extensive good to future generations. When Jacob exclaimed, "All these things are against me," he was not aware that Joseph, whom he mourned as no more, was exalted and in great glory; that Simeon was safe in the house of his brother; that the temporary sacrifice of Benjamin was necessary to the general benefit, and that all these things were about to unite the whole family in a place of safety and abundance.

From the days of Jacob to our own, the same querulous spirit has prevailed, and ever will do so, while men regard their own feelings and concerns without taking a general and comprehensive view of the Divine goodness in the administration of the world. Were they to consider themselves as parts of one great moral system, under the constant direction of Infinite Intelligence, their cares would appear light, and the difficulties of life be swallowed up in the vast ocean of boundless love. Instead of lamenting irretrievable losses, and complaining of the inscrutable visitations of Providence, they would, in the midst of all the darkness with which they are surrounded, and the trials which exercise their pa-

JUDAH'S CONFESSION.

tience, find rich consolation in the language of the Apostle, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. viii. 38, 39.

JANUARY THE TWENTY-FIRST.

JUDAH'S CONFESSION.

Genesis, xliv. 16.—*God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants.*

SIN, though long concealed, will be visited, and the transgressor made to remember it, either to his sorrow or his shame. Years indeed may pass away, and, amidst the hurry of employment, or the succession of pleasures, the iniquity may be almost forgotten; yet an occasion will unexpectedly arise, when that which has been involved in the dark recesses of oblivion will put forth its deadly shoots, poisoning the sources of enjoyment, and imbittering the residue of life. This usually happens when sickness impels the mind to consideration, or some severe calamity brings it to a state of recollection. Sometimes a fresh lapse into error has the effect of awakening the soul to a sight and sense of all its enormities, and thus by bringing the sins of omission and commission under review, excites that solemn concern which produces deep humiliation and lasting repentance. We do not read of any contrition expressed by the brethren of Joseph till his severe charge against them, of being spies, brought their wickedness to remembrance. They were now in Egypt, the very country where most probably they thought that the object of their cruelty

had long since perished; justly, then, did they think that the vengeance of Heaven had overtaken them, which drew from their lips this confession, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." Though Joseph was greatly moved by these complaints and reproaches, he conceived it necessary to make a farther trial of his brethren, that their repentance might be the deeper, and their security in Egypt be more firmly established. He therefore contrived the expedient of detaining his younger brother, to prove the affection of the rest, and thereby induce his father to visit Egypt. In the distress occasioned by the apparent crime of Benjamin, the eloquence of Judah burst forth with an energy superior to all the studied efforts of oratory. Far from endeavouring to extenuate the offence, he made an ingenuous confession, that "God had found out their iniquity." It is obvious that in this declaration Judah adverted to some other circumstance than that which had involved him and his brethren in their present disgrace and affliction. Regarding Joseph as endued with a prophetic spirit, Judah in deep humility acknowledged the present visitation to be a just retribution for past transgression. He well knew his own innocence of the alleged offence, and he had sufficient reasons to think the same at least of nine of his brethren; yet we find him admitting that "God had found out their iniquity and his own." This certainly had a reference to that deep and complicated act in which the ten were concerned, and Judah more than the rest, as it was by his counsel that the victim of envy and malice was sold for twenty pieces of silver. In the whole of his address upon this occasion, Judah expressed the sentiments of a true penitent; and his offer to become a bond-slave in the room of Benjamin, was an affecting proof, that

amidst all his faults he had a lively sense of filial duty, and the most tender concern for the comfort of his aged father. "Now, therefore," said he, "when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us (seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life), it shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die: and thy servant shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave."

This was sufficient to satisfy the generous mind of Joseph, who no longer delayed the important discovery, which he made in the true spirit of love, and with the most compassionate regard to the feelings of his brethren. The whole of the narrative teaches us this important lesson, that iniquity must be brought to remembrance, and accompanied by sincere confession and repentance in this life, otherwise the Dispenser of grace will be known only in his judicial character, as "a consuming fire." Joseph in Egypt typified the Redeemer, suffering and exalted for the salvation of his people, who were figured by Judah, penitent and obedient at the footstool of the righteous person, whom he had persecuted and sold into the hands of the enemy. So the family of Jacob will be gathered into one fold, when they are brought to a sense of their iniquity; and, in the language of the Prophet, they shall say to each other: "Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us; in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain upon the earth." Hos. vi. 1, 3.

JANUARY THE TWENTY-SECOND.

JOSEPH'S ADVICE.

Genesis, xlv. 24.—*See that ye fall not out by the way.*

SUCH was the benevolent and judicious counsel of Joseph to his brethren, when he dismissed them with the carriages to bring down their families into Egypt. He knew enough of their tempers to be apprehensive that they would reproach each other for their behaviour towards him, when they should be free from the restraint of his presence. Their shades of guilt were indeed very different; for while some of them proposed to murder him, Reuben, by a good-natured scheme, diverted them from the immediate execution of their bloody design; and Judah, by an avaricious suggestion, proved the instrument of bringing about this wonderful change in their circumstances. It was natural therefore to suppose, that these men, on their journey towards Canaan, would make the recent occurrences in Egypt the frequent subject of conversation, which must of course lead them to speak of their own conduct in terms of reproach and recrimination. Joseph heard them do this at their first appearance before him, when Reuben increased the affliction of the rest by this bitter remark, "Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child, and ye would not hear? therefore behold also his blood is required." To prevent therefore any mischief which might arise from this spirit of contention, Joseph gave them the strong and affectionate charge, "See that ye fall not out, or be stirred up with strife, by the way." This admonition not only indicated the kindness of his heart, but his thorough acquaintance with human nature; for none are so apt to fall out as those persons who are conscious of their own impro-

per disposition and conduct. Each endeavours to find an excuse for his own failing, in the greater errors of his neighbour; and judging by comparison, he receives a miserable kind of satisfaction in contemplating the deeper malignity of his acquaintance. Even when the mind is awakened to an abhorrence of iniquity, it is at first too much inclined to form a more favourable idea of its own character than self-examination will approve, by considering the deportment of others in similar situations. Thus the spirit of envy increases strife and multiplies contentions, because men will not grant the same allowance to others which they claim for themselves; but are always anxious to find an apology for their own faults and deficiencies, in attacking the weakness and wickedness of those around them. The brethren of Joseph were no doubt truly ashamed of their unnatural treatment of him; but in lamenting the crime, of which conscience convicted them, it was natural that some of them should feel a little relief on reflecting that they were not so deep in guilt as their companions. Well, therefore, did Joseph caution them to avoid all occasions of dispute, but to pursue their journey amicably, without stirring up or reviving any questions which might excite displeasing reflections and invidious disputations among them. Happy would it be, if, in the great journey of human life, this precept were more generally regarded; in which case there would be greater comfort in families, unity in public councils, and harmony in the church of God. Instead of seeking opportunities for odious comparisons and useless disputes, they who are actuated by a truly religious spirit will endeavour to stir up their neighbours unto edification, by instructing the ignorant, admonishing those who are out of the way, and encouraging one another in that faith which worketh by love. Leaving those who are desirous of being wise above what is written, to exercise their

faculties in vain contentions and strifes about words, the genuine disciples of the meek and lowly Redeemer will be continually solicitous to maintain peace in their own hearts, by obeying his dying injunction: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." John, xiii. 34.

JANUARY THE TWENTY-THIRD.

IDOLATRY OF THE EGYPTIANS.

Genesis, xvi. 34.—*For every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians.*

LIGHT and darkness are not more dissonant than truth and error. Imnumerable attempts have been made to confound these opposite principles; and such is the influence of custom and example, that men, by observing things through a false medium, frequently embrace evil as their chief good, and reject what is essential to happiness as an intolerable grievance. In their dislike to religion, as a burden too heavy for free and ingenuous minds, they submit to the most degrading bondage, become the slaves of their passions, and the dupes of an extravagant imagination. Of this we have a remarkable evidence in the early history of Egypt; which country, though famous for the wisdom of its sages, was overspread with the grossest follies, and the most debasing services, under the names of sublime philosophy and refined religion. Yet with all their boasted science and virtue, no people had more ridiculous notions or corrupt practices than the Egyptians. Notwithstanding their great pretensions to a superior knowledge of the Divinity, they multiplied deities without number, and adored animals of various kinds and

opposite qualities, the useful and the noxious, the noble and contemptible, not even omitting vermin and reptiles. Nay, to such a degree did they carry this superstition, as to worship inanimate objects, and offer sacrifices to the very elements. But while these people acknowledged the Divinity under such a variety of forms, they had no enlarged views of that benevolence which governs the world, and consequently were without any just ideas of the human dignity and duty. They sought the Deity every where except in themselves; and while they recognised his terror in the crocodile, and his bounty in the Nile, they forgot the impression of his excellence on the human soul, and had more regard for the life of a beast than that of a man. With such degrading notions and practices, it is no wonder that the Egyptians should hate those men who had so little respect for the inferior creature, as to offer them in sacrifice to an invisible power. It was not merely the pastoral occupation which the Egyptians held in abhorrence, because we find that Pharaoh had extensive flocks and herds, the rule or management of which was considered as an office of great distinction. When therefore it is said, that "every shepherd was an abomination to the Egyptians," it must be understood of some religious profession, which was adverse to the idolatry of Egypt. The word indeed implies as much; and accordingly we read elsewhere, that the animals held sacred by the Egyptians were, on that account, termed an abomination to the Hebrews.

But it does not appear that the family of Jacob carried their enmity farther than against the idolatries of Egypt: while the people of that country, on the other hand, considered the very persons of the Hebrews as so vile, that it was an abomination to eat with them. This spirit of intolerance, which prevails among all the enemies of religious truth, has, however, the effect of keeping the righteous apart

from a sinful communion. Thus was Israel preserved in a strange land by the overruling hand of God turning the animosity of the Egyptians to the advancement of his own purpose, and the ultimate benefit of his chosen people. In like manner the church, of which Israel was a figure, is graciously kept in the midst of darkness and corruption, contention and persecution, as a little flock, equally safe in the wilderness and in Goshen, being under the Divine guidance and protection, though treated as an abomination by the world. As Joseph directed his brethren to make known their profession to Pharaoh, so must the members of the spiritual Israel witness a good confession, though exposed to the hatred of a crooked and perverse generation. That this course will bring upon them the contempt of those who affect superior wisdom, and the enmity of the vicious, is no more than what has been experienced by the righteous in every age. It is indeed their inevitable portion; and whoever looks for any other cannot obtain the object of his desire, without such a conformity to lying vanities, as will amount at least to a virtual sacrifice of truth. Joseph set a different example, when he chose rather to endure the misery of a dungeon than yield to the allurements of sin. But a greater than Joseph is before us, who has left this declaration as a sacred rule for his church, to the end of its militant course: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." John, xv. 18, 19.

JANUARY THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

THE HOPE OF ISRAEL.

Genesis, xlvii. 31.— *And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head.*

THE scriptural history, considered only in the letter, will appear in many places obscure and inexplicable; but the same passages, viewed in a spiritual light, will be found rich in sense and pregnant with instruction. Of this kind is the relation of the last days of Jacob, the minute detail of which may seem almost trifling to those who look no farther than the literal order of the story. The holy patriarch, however, had something else in contemplation besides the simple narrative of the circumstances attending the death of the patriarch; and it is for want of examining into that hidden meaning, that this, as well as many other parts of the sacred volume, remains as a sealed book, apparently obsolete, and of little interest. But by attending closely to the circumstances, and regarding them with an evangelical illustration, we shall perhaps find, that even some of the lesser objects in the history, and incidents at first sight trivial, have a very important end, and connect the whole with great propriety and beauty. Thus the elevation of Joseph, and the settlement of Israel in Egypt, were not only real and interesting events in themselves, but typical of future circumstances and characters. When the patriarch was on his journey, the Lord appeared unto him at Beersheba, in the visions of the night, and said, "I am God, the God of thy father; fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation. I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again; and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes."

This gracious declaration had an extended prospect to the going forth of the posterity of Jacob, guided and protected by the mighty hand and outstretched arm of Jehovah. Resting upon this promise, the aged patriarch having received an intimation that the time of his dissolution drew nigh, called his son Joseph, and said unto him, "If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt; but I will lie with my fathers; and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their burying-place. And Joseph said, I will do as thou hast said. And Jacob said, Swear unto me. And he swore unto him. And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head."

In this covenant we perceive the desire of Jacob to lie with his fathers, and the caution taken by him to bind Joseph to the fulfilment of his promise by a solemn oath. At first sight it would seem as if Jacob did not trust his favourite child with the confidence which he deserved, by exacting from him such a ceremony, in a matter of comparatively little moment. But the business was of higher import: and, in the first place, it showed the concern of the patriarch for his children, who, he feared, would have no inclination to leave Egypt for the land of promise, if the body of their father should continue with them, embalmed according to the custom of the country. Jacob was therefore exceedingly anxious to have his remains deposited with those of his great progenitors; that his people, having continually his dying injunction in remembrance, might consider themselves only as strangers and sojourners, even in the fertile province of Goshen. Jacob firmly relied upon the verity of Him who had said that his children should inherit the land promised to their fathers; and to preserve the same faith and expectation in their minds, he gave this commandment concerning his burial.

But there was yet more in the transaction; for the peculiar ceremonial by which Joseph was bound to the performance of the contract, had an immediate reference to the great covenant established with Abraham, and confirmed by a symbolical rite, indicating the righteous seed, or Messiah, upon whose thigh is a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. To this great Redeemer did the patriarch, in the spirit of prophecy, now look; and the whole of this scene was an exhibition of strong and clear faith in that resurrection, of which the future deliverance of Israel from the house of bondage was to prove a typical representation. When the covenant was ratified, the "patriarch bowed himself upon the bed's head," or, as the Greek version has it, "he worshipped towards the end of his staff;" which translation has for its support the high authority of St. Paul. The two readings, however, may be easily reconciled, if, by the top of the staff or rod, the judicial sceptre of Joseph be understood, towards which the venerable Jacob leaped or bowed himself from his couch, and thus acknowledged the authority of his son, agreeable to the mystical predictions communicated to him many years before, in Canaan. When Jacob heard of those dreams, which prefigured the future greatness of Joseph, he rebuked him, and said, "Shall I and thy mother, and thy brethren, indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?" But now all these secret monitions were exactly accomplished, and what Jacob and his elder sons regarded with jealousy, they now performed with a willing mind, and offered to their illustrious relative as a grateful service. Thus also the Anointed One, whom Joseph represented, though once despised and rejected in the house of his relations and friends, is now seated upon the holy hill of Zion, holding the sceptre of righteousness to those who, by faith and obedience, accept his mercy; but a rod of iron to

his enemies. "Kiss," therefore, "the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish by the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." Ps. ii. 12.

JANUARY THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

EPHRAIM AND MANASSEH.

Genesis, xlviii. 16.—*The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the tithes.*

PURSUING the same course of spiritual interpretation, we come to another incident, in the dying scene of Jacob, which, by looking no farther than the literal narrative, would appear still more difficult to be accounted for than any other part of the history. When "the time drew near that Israel must die," of which event he had either some particular intimation, or gathered it from the actual course of things, he sent for Joseph, and entered into a solemn agreement with him concerning his burial. This was before his final illness; and thus did he give an admirable example of preparing for his great change, and setting his house in order, in the season of calm recollection, and while his mental faculties were in exercise. Not long after this interview, Joseph hearing that his father lay dangerously sick, hastened to visit him with his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim. On this occasion the patriarch admitted these children of Joseph among the tribes, who were to be called by his name; and in doing this he pronounced over them a sacred benediction, but with the remarkable difference of crossing his hands, and placing the right on the head of Ephraim, the younger, and the left on Manasseh, the elder. This is another instance of the preference being given to the younger son over the

sider, without assigning any reason for it in the history; and certainly, in the present case, without any grounds for that distinction in the character of the youths. But the whole was figurative, both the choice itself and the manner in which it was expressed. Ephraim here represented, as his name imported, the fruitfulness of the Gentiles, who believed in the Messiah, and increased into a church, while the Jews forgot or rejected him. The names which Joseph gave to his sons were in this sense prophetic, that of the elder-born signifying *forgettings*, and that of the younger *fruitfulness*. In the transverse position of the hands of Israel, when engaged in this prophetic action, we may see a representation of the means by which the families of the earth are reconciled unto God, even by one body on the cross. This remarkable scene shadowed also something more, and described exactly what, in process of time, was really accomplished, in the formation of his kingdom, who was rejected by the elder branch and obeyed by the younger; or, in the words of the Apostle, "when blindness in part happened unto Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles should come in." Rom. xi. 25.

The language of the patriarch, on this occasion, corresponds with this view of the transaction, and with this only. "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the GOD which fed me all my life long unto this day; the ANGEL, which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads, and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and let them grow into a multitude, in the midst of the earth." Here the persons, upon whom the blessing is pronounced, and consequently those represented by them, are united under the protection of the redeeming Angel, who also is God. Though a difference is predicted, as to order and number, yet both Ephraim and Manasseh are joined together in the enjoyment of the same salva-

tion. The Jew and the Gentile have but one "Redeemer, who is God over all, blessed for ever." It was this great article of faith which the dying patriarch confessed, when he said, that his name and that of his fathers should be named upon the sons of Joseph. Now it could not be the name either of Jacob or of Abraham or Isaac, which the Holy Spirit here conveyed, but the ineffable name of that Being in whom those believers trusted for redemption. They had frequent communications with him as the ANGEL-JEHOVAH; but all these manifestations were of a mysterious nature, and had a prophetic design. To us, however, who have been happily called in the fulness of time, the obscurity is cleared up, and we behold in these various typical exhibitions the eternal WORD, "who, being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow; and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philip. ii. 8. 11.

JANUARY THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

THE BLESSING OF JUDAH.

Genesis, xlix. 8.—*Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise.*

THE dying words of eminent men are usually considered with attention, and treated with solemn respect. He must be unfeeling indeed who can either hear, without improvement, the last declarations of superior wisdom, or regard with indifference the devotional aspirations of departing virtue. But when the ex-

piring voice bequeaths lessons of general instruction, and especially when it communicates information affecting the dearest interests of individuals or communities, the bequest commands permanent veneration. Change of circumstances cannot lessen the value of the gift, nor the lapse of ages destroy the obligation. Though the terms may have been long since fulfilled, the debt of gratitude, instead of being cancelled, acquires new force from a consideration of the benefits which the promise has secured. All this applies with peculiar force to the revelations of those holy men who were under the guidance of the spirit of prophecy, and particularly to the last sayings of Jacob, in which he allotted the several portions of his children, and predicted their future condition in the promised land. Among all these the declaration made to Judah stands pre-eminent, as containing, with the grant of temporal possessions and an extensive dominion, the promise of the blessed seed. The earthly inheritance, which Jacob received from Abraham and Isaac, he had it in his power to divide in suitable proportions among his children; but this was not the case with the spiritual, which could descend only in one tribe, and be born in some particular family. Hence the patriarch, in the distribution of the prerogatives which were to distinguish his respective descendants, was under the necessity of communicating more to one than to all the rest. This favour rested upon Judah, whose name, signifying *confession*, was prophetic of the distinction now conferred upon him, and of the singular blessing which should arise in his line. To this import of his son's name, the patriarch has a direct reference, when he says, "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise;" implying the harmony of their confession and grateful submission to the righteous sceptre of the Messiah. Judah is here put for that great object of faith; and the passage amounts to this, that

all the tribes shall in the end unite in ascribing "salvation unto God, who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." Rev. vii. 10.

In the same spirit, the description is carried on with an astonishing sublimity of expression, and grandeur of imagery. "Thy hand," says the patriarch, "shall be in the neck of thine enemies." To understand this, our ideas must be conveyed back to the great judicial scene in the garden, when the adversary heard the denunciation, that "the seed of the woman should bruise his head." In the prophecy of Jacob that sentence is delineated, by the action of the victor seizing his potent foe, in the seat of his strength, and thus disarming him of his sting and power. From this conflict we are rapidly conducted to the splendour of a joyful triumph: "Thy father's children shall bow down before thee." Perhaps in one sense this may have been fulfilled, in the exaltation of Judah, as a military and princely tribe; but taking the whole as one grand representation of contest and victory, it will be found to exceed any thing accomplished by the sons of Israel, whether separately or in conjunction. Though Judah certainly became more renowned and powerful than any of the other tribes, it cannot be said to have acquired universal dominion. But, in a spiritual sense, this promise exactly applied to the Conqueror, whom Judah represented; for, having vanquished the old enemy, and spoiled principalities and powers, he hath obtained the sovereignty over the redeemed of all nations and ages; so that "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth." Philip. ii. 10. The dying Prophet goes on still figuratively, but appropriately, describing the actions of this mighty warrior. "Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?"

Nothing can be conceived more exquisitely beautiful than this comparison of Judah to the most noble and terrible of animals, rising slowly from the prey in the valley, and going up in majestic grandeur to the mountain. The history of Judah's tribe, however, affords very feeble points of resemblance to this sublime imagery; and therefore we are impelled to look for the signification in the success of the true "Lion of the tribe of Judah, who prevailed in executing the Divine decrees, and thereby wrought out redemption for men, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Rev. v. 5. 9. Having accomplished this great work in the valley of humiliation, "he ascended up on high, bearing captivity captive, and bestowing gifts upon men." Eph. iv. 8. This triumphant ascension, the Psalmist exhibits in a strain of celestial eloquence: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." Ps. xxiv. 7, 8.

We come now to that part of the blessing which has excited the particular consideration of Jews and Christians in all ages. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until SHILOH come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." Without labouring to discuss the meaning of the word *sceptre*, in this place, certain it is, that some degree of temporal power is implied by it, as well as a settled form of government. But the character of the people to whom the prophecy was given, will explain the authority here predicted. No nation but the Jews ever had a theocracy, or a government immediately derived from Heaven. This institution continued invariable from the time of its original establishment, till the period when Judea became a Roman province, which was soon after the ascension of our Lord. Within that interval

SHILOH must have made his appearance ; for, since the foundation of the Christian church, the Jews, instead of being gathered, or collected into one community, have been scattered, peeled, and trodden down, upon the face of the whole earth. Is. xviii. 2. 7. Instead of possessing the power to make any laws, they have been unable to maintain and enforce those of the Mosaic code. The system of legislation which distinguished their nation above all others, and continued in effective operation even when the Jews were captives in heathen lands, has been long since to them a dead letter. They have also substituted new forms, to supply the want of those ordinances which, by the law of Moses, were to be observed according to the strict terms of the original ceremonial, as a perpetual statute. But though any alteration of that ritual was strictly forbidden, on pain of death, this people have, in their dispersed state, been under the necessity of making many important changes, without the authority of an inspired legislator, while at the same time they are deprived of all secular power to punish those who violate their own regulations. By comparing this prophecy, therefore, with the history of the Jews, and considering also their present condition, without a sacrifice or priesthood, country or king, we have a demonstrative proof that SHILOH has come ; but in what sense the peoples are gathered unto him, remains to be examined. The tribes of Israel, so far from being gathered into one body, since the departure of the sceptre from Judah, are but little known to each other, and most of them have been quite lost in the general wreck of their nation. SHILOH, therefore, cannot, as yet, be said to have gathered them, though the terms of the prediction are express, that to him shall the gathering of the peoples be. But in fact these subjects of his dominion are different from the descendants of Jacob, and as such they are clearly distinguished in the pro-

phesy. Till the coming of SHILOH they are evidently strangers or aliens from the covenant of promise; but when he appears, then these separated peoples become united, and they who were before without a priest and a king, form one righteous community, of which he is the head. The termination of the theocracy is the establishment of a more enlarged institution, chiefly consisting of the Gentiles, here called the peoples; and all this was exactly accomplished when the Son of God settled his church upon earth, and left this commission to his disciples, "Go ye and teach all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. The gathering of the Gentiles was abundant, after Peter had opened the apostolical commission, and preached the Gospel of grace freely, to the household of Cornelius.

Besides this great influx of the Gentiles to the church, there will be two more gatherings of people unto Christ—one in the general conversion of the Jews themselves, in the latter days; and the other in the resurrection of the saints from the dead. Whatever be the literal meaning of the word applied in this prophecy to that great object, whether it denote a "peacemaker," or the "person who shall be sent," "his Son," or the "hidden treasure," certain it is, and in this all the Targums agree, that as, by the sceptre, principality is implied, so by the name SHILOH the Messiah only is expressed. Taking these senses either together or separately, they signify the great Reconciler and Enlightener, who coming forth in the energy of Divine power, as the only begotten Son, unites all things unto himself; and imparts the rich treasures of grace and mercy to those afar off and to those who are nigh. The blessings of his kingdom

are thus described in the fertile patrimony of Judah ; “ binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’s colt unto the choice vine : he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes : his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.” As the inheritance of Judah far excelled that of his brethren in the land flowing with milk and honey ; so the spiritual blessings of those who are incorporated into the church of Christ infinitely transcend all the riches and enjoyments of this world. Even the meanest subject in this kingdom is united to the true Vine, under the shadow of which he sits down in perfect security, and with great delight. The Messiah, in the days of his humiliation, trod the wine-press alone, and all his garments were stained with blood. By his great work of obedience and triumph over the powers of darkness, he hath reversed the curse, and procured free access to the “ Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” Rev. ii. 7. He now therefore proclaims aloud to all nations by his word and his Spirit, “ Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters ; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy, and eat : yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Is. lv. 1.

JANUARY THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

THE DEATH OF JACOB.

Genesis, xlix. 33.—*And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.*

WHEN the king of Egypt said to Jacob, “ How old art thou ? ” his reply was couched in these remarkable and solemn terms : “ The days of the years

of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and I have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." This was not the language of complaint, but of pious confession. The patriarch acknowledged that he was no more than what his fathers had been in their generation, "a stranger and a pilgrim upon the earth." He was asked his age, and he mentions the days of his years, as so many stages in his journey. To others, who were looking forward upon the world, one hundred and thirty years must have appeared a very long period, filled with various important incidents: but in the estimation of the patriarch, even the days which made up that large portion of time were few, and those he declared to have been evil. This will be the impartial estimate of human life, which every serious mind will form when he comes to the close of it, and takes an exact review of what he has experienced under the sun. We have here no continuing city, or abiding place; but the spaces of time we pass through, and the circumstances which daily occur, press this truth constantly upon us, that every moment is a subtraction from life, and that all our enjoyments are connected with mortality. Whether the days of our years be comparatively many or few, they must come to an end; and it will be happy for us, if, like the patriarch, we keep this consideration in view, and regard ourselves as pilgrims only upon earth, "looking for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Heb. xi. 10. When "the time drew near that Israel must die," of which he was sensible, not by any particular sickness, but from the observation that he was now at the age of one hundred and forty-seven years, he began to settle his concerns, first by giving commandment respecting his burial, and next by determining the several portions

of his sons in the land of promise. If we take an attentive survey of this scene, and contemplate the dying patriarch surrounded by his family, all united and waiting in silent submission to hear what should befall them in the last days, the prophecy will appear more interesting, as being addressed to those who typically represented the church. In the power of the Spirit, Jacob delivered predictions and bestowed prerogatives, in terms of high authority, though he was himself but a sojourner in a strange land, where he knew that his descendants would be reduced to slavery and suffer persecution. Thus the great Head of the church, immediately before his passion, gave promises and commandments to his disciples, foretold what should happen to them after his departure; and though he made them acquainted with the afflictions which they would endure, he comforted them with this blessing: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John, xvi. 33. When the patriarch "had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people." We are told that he strengthened himself to sit upon his bed, to bless the sons of Joseph; and he seems to have done the same on this occasion: having finished his charge, he altered his position, and stretching himself at his length on the couch, expired as it were by a voluntary act, in this also resembling the Redeemer, who cried with a loud voice, and yielded up the ghost. The expression of being "gathered unto his people" is to be understood of his spirit, which went to join the souls of the faithful in the state of rest and joyful expectation: "being bound," according to the emphatic language of Scripture, "in the bundle of life." 1 Sam. xxv. 29. Thus Jacob died, as he had lived, in perfect reliance upon the Divine

promise, which he indicated in his care to be buried in the sepulchre of Abraham, and more fully declared in that pious aspiration, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord!"

JANUARY THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

THE FAITH OF JOSEPH.

Genesis, i. 25.—*So Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.*

It may seem strange that so great a man as Joseph should be solicitous about the preservation of his remains in Egypt, instead of exacting a promise from his brethren to bury him in Canaan, as he had done his father. Yet an Apostle, passing over all the remarkable circumstances in the life of this patriarch, has fixed upon the very incident under consideration, to illustrate the piety of his character. "By faith, Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." Heb. xi. 22. The oath which he now took from the heads of the tribes became a perpetual obligation, and was to be transmitted, in regular succession, to their descendants, till the actual deliverance, which Joseph predicted, should be accomplished. This engagement therefore, followed, as it necessarily must be, by a sacred watchfulness over the relics of their illustrious relative and benefactor, tended to keep the Israelites in constant expectation of their departure from Egypt. So long as the bones of Joseph were the objects of religious care, the reason of their conservation must have been well understood; and thus, in looking forwards to the promised inheritance, the people would

consider themselves as sojourners in a strange land. It was of essential importance that the Israelites should be kept apart from the Egyptians, and particularly from any idolatrous contamination; for which purpose the dying injunction of Joseph was intended to serve as a standing record, showing the original settlement of his people in that country, and the certainty of their complete emancipation. To the righteous man it is a matter of indifference where his body may be deposited; and Joseph knew that the same Power could guard his sleeping dust in Egypt as well as in Palestine. But in giving this charge he acted as a prophet and a legislator, bequeathing the prediction of redemption unto Israel, and leaving his bones in their care, as a permanent memorial of the promise. In the season of prosperity, the solemn direction of the venerated patriarch was well calculated to keep his family free from corruption, while under the yoke of oppression it could hardly fail to inspire them with hope. The remembrance of Joseph might be forgotten by those who were indebted to his wisdom and virtue for their existence as a nation, but this ingratitude would only serve to render his memory more precious among the children of Israel. Justly therefore is the conduct of Joseph attributed to the strength of his faith, as it comprehended a firm confidence in the promise, and perfect love to his people, whose welfare was the end he had in view, when he "gave this commandment concerning his bones." But, in truth, the faith of the patriarch extended far beyond the temporal deliverance of Israel, and the conveyance of his remains to the land of Canaan. The preservation of his bones, by a solemn covenant, represented the redemption of the church in the death of Christ, and the resurrection of its members, in his conquest over death. Joseph knew that his bones would live again; and in this faith he took an oath of his family to preserve

them entire, as the visible pledge that Israel should be restored to life and liberty, in the land promised to their fathers. Thus the patriarch, in his death, and the order which he left for the consolation of his people, was a striking figure of Him from whom the church receives all the supplies of grace here, and the assurance of future glory. In Him she finds present comfort under every trial, and this promise is the strong ground of confidence to all her faithful members: "Thy dead men shall live; together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake, and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead." Is. xxvi. 19.

JANUARY THE TWENTY-NINTH.

ISRAEL IN EGYPT.

Exodus, i. 12.—*But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew.*

EVERY project formed by the adversary against the church has produced the contrary effect to what he intended. Persecution has only served to increase her numbers, and the opposition of infidelity to display more forcibly the power of Divine truth. "Her foundation is in the holy mountains;" and neither the combinations of men nor the devices of Satan can overturn what has been laid by Infinite Wisdom. "The gates of hell shall not prevail" against the promises of God, which are engaged for the preservation of a chosen seed, who, in every age, will be accounted unto Him as a generation. When the family of Israel went into Egypt, it was comparatively small and insignificant; but in a few years "it increased abundantly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty."

While the memory of Joseph was held in veneration among the Egyptians, the Israelites appear to have been respected on account of their affinity to that illustrious statesman. At length "a new king arose up over Egypt who knew not Joseph;" by which expression some suppose that another dynasty took place in that kingdom, the founder of which was ignorant of the services rendered to the nation by the ministry of Joseph. It is more probable, however, that this new king was one who hated the memory of that just man, and being of a violent disposition was resolved to effect a revolution in the constitution of the country. No monarch could obtain the sovereignty of Egypt without observing the great numbers and peculiar manners of the Hebrews. Now it was hardly possible for him to do this without inquiring at the same time into the origin of so remarkable a distinction as that of one body of people living in the heart of another, yet speaking a different language, practising singular customs, and worshipping only an invisible Deity.

In examining into the history of this separation, the name and merits of Joseph would necessarily be brought forward, and exhibited in glowing colours even by the Egyptians. What a wandering horde of barbarians would have treasured up with care, and transmitted down with gratitude to their posterity, this nation, professing superior wisdom, could not easily have forgotten. The Pharaoh, therefore, who now ruled, was certainly acquainted with the brilliant character of Joseph; but having a malignant design against the Hebrews, he would no longer suffer that great man to be acknowledged as the common father of both nations. The next step of the tyrant was to make an artful appeal to the fears of his native subjects, by representing the danger to which they were exposed from the number and might of the Israelites. This shows that the new king, so far from being a

conqueror, was a coward, and his language proves it ; " Come now," said he, " let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply ; and it come to pass, that when there falleth out any war they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us ; and so get them up out of the land."* The cunning contrivance, which Pharaoh and his council dignified with the name of wisdom, was a cruel device to reduce some of the most peaceable and industrious inhabitants of Egypt to the lowest state of vassalage and misery. Such policy was calculated to destroy its own purpose ; since, in the event of war, persons so degraded were more likely to rise upon their oppressors than to contend with an invading army. Though nothing of this kind happened during the slavery of Israel, the scheme of the tyrant to lessen their numbers proved ineffectual ; and all the hard usage which they suffered from the task-masters who were set over them, never produced any attempt to revolt, nor occasioned the migration of one of the tribes. This patient submission of the chosen people during their long and painful bondage, is highly honourable to their character, and unquestionably must have been the result of religious principle ; since, in the confession of Pharaoh himself, they were both " greater in numbers and mightier than the Egyptians." Here Israel figured the church, which takes deepest root in adversity, and shoots forth its fertile branches most vigorously when opposed by the storm of persecution. Notwithstanding all the tyrannical acts of Pharaoh and his courtiers to depress and exterminate the Israelites, the more " they were afflicted the more they multiplied and grew." From seventy souls, which were the original number of Jacob's family who entered Goshen, they increased to such a degree as to number the formidable host of more than six hundred thousand fighting men at the time of their departure from Egypt. The consideration of this

miraculous preservation and stupendous increase of Israel, brings to our view that remarkable period when seventy disciples received the Divine commission to preach the Gospel of the kingdom. They went out apparently feeble and destitute, as "lambs among wolves;" but they returned again with joy, saying, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said, Behold I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding this, rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." Luke, x. 17. 20.

JANUARY THE THIRTIETH.

THE PRESERVATION OF MOSES.

Exodus, ii. 10.—And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name MOSES: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

WHEN Providence has some mighty work to accomplish, even those instruments which are set in direct opposition to the design, will be made powerfully effectual to hasten its execution. The ambition and cruelty of wicked men who have no other end in view than their personal aggrandizement, shall be turned to the ultimate advantage of those whom they intend to destroy. To gratify the abominable desire of revenge, or the inordinate thirst for dominion, the tyrants devise projects against others which terminate in their own disgrace; and in attempting schemes of universal conquest they enable even the most despised nations to subjugate, at last,

their mighty oppressors. History affords many instances of this ; and the case of afflicted Israel in Egypt is a striking proof that " the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong," but that those who flatter themselves with being persons of great power and sagacity are both feeble and foolish in the sight of God. When Pharaoh proposed to deal wisely, by acting wickedly towards the children of Israel, he thought the most effectual way to lessen their numbers was to oppress them by excessive labour. But this only made the people compact, hardy, and industrious, the consequence of which was, that the " more they were afflicted the more they multiplied." Disappointment inflamed the rage and increased the fears of the tyrant, who being resolved at least to prevent another generation of Hebrews, ordered all the male children that should be born among them to be destroyed. Upon the failure of this inhuman device, through the pety of the midwives, Pharaoh commanded the infants to be cast into the Nile ; and, to insure the execution of the decree, it was entrusted to the Egyptians, whose superstition seems to have been consulted in the grant of this abominable sacrifice to their favourite deity. It is probable that the savage monarch was moved to this measure by a knowledge of the current belief among the Israelites, that they should be delivered from their state of bondage, and be guided under a powerful leader to their own land. The assurance of this was indeed the only consolation of the afflicted people, and of course the expected Saviour would engage much of their thoughts and conversation. To frustrate the prediction, and to annihilate all ideas of independence which it created, the king of Egypt had recourse to this expedient, resolving, like Herod, to cut off at once the object of his dread and the hope of Israel. But the course which he adopted to prevent the fulfilment of the promise, proved the means

of bringing it to pass. The very element employed to destroy the destined deliverer, became the instrument of his preservation; and he not only found protection under the roof of Pharaoh, but acquired there much of that knowledge which was necessary to his qualification as the leader of a great people.

Through the whole of this wonderful history we perceive the direct operation of Providence; first, in regulating the conduct of the pious parent, and next, in guiding the Egyptian princess to the spot where the babe was deposited. That Jochebed should indulge a hope of saving her child when she could no longer keep him in her house, appears very extraordinary; but an Apostle has solved the matter by ascribing it to the power of faith. Her contrivance, though ingenious, was not calculated to preserve the child long from destruction. But the fond parent did her utmost, and then left the issue to God. He who put it into her heart to prepare the ark of rushes, touched the soul of Pharaoh's daughter with pity when the infant wept. Such exposures on the river were frequent at that time; for the princess, on discovering the contents of the ark, said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children;" but neither that circumstance, nor the consideration of her father's edict, could check the force of sympathy, nor prevent the exercise of compassion. Thus the piety of the parents was rewarded in the restoration of their child, upon whose mind they had full opportunity to inculcate the principles of pure religion. With what success their efforts were crowned, appears in the zeal which Moses displayed when he avenged the death of one of his countrymen upon the murderer. So far was he from being ashamed of his origin, or corrupted by the splendour and gaiety of a court, that he rejected the allurements of rank, and preferred honest poverty to wealth and distinction, which could only be purchased by apostacy. "By faith Moses, when

he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter: choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of reward." Heb. xi. 24. 26.

JANUARY THE THIRTY-FIRST.

THE MISSION OF MOSES.

Exodus, iii. 14.—*GOD said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.*

DIVINE Wisdom, in the choice of means and seasons for the accomplishment of vast designs, usually takes a different course from what human policy would consider as best adapted to the purpose. Viewing Moses as the appointed deliverer of Israel, we should have been disposed to fix our main expectation upon him when he was in the prime of life, and surrounded with the splendour of a court as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. He was not only learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, but at that time mighty in words and in deeds. Such is the account which Stephen, "full of the Holy Ghost," gives of Moses, adding this also, that in slaying the Egyptian "he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them; but they understood not." Acts, vii. 22. 25. The blindness of Israel in this instance, though a proof of jealousy and ingratitude, was consistent with the order of Providence, since Moses had not as yet received the Divine commission; neither was the manner in which

he undertook the cause of his people agreeable to the plan of their salvation. The work was to be of God, and therefore the hand of man was not to appear in it, otherwise than as being merely instrumental, and subservient to the Almighty Saviour. In the case of slaying the Egyptian, though the provocation might justify the punishment, yet Moses acted solely from the impulse of zeal; but if he thought thereby to rouse the Israelites into a revolt, he was mistaken; for, instead of taking fire by the example, or choosing him for their leader, they said, "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" Finding that his brethren were insensible to his kindness, that they ascribed his generous interference on their behalf to unworthy motives, and that in fact his life was in danger, Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and found an asylum in the family of Jethro, the prince of Midian. Here he lived forty years, contented with the pastoral occupation, and in the enjoyment of domestic comforts, losing the fervour of his zeal, and almost forgetting the afflictions of Israel. This long period, however, was not spent without improvement; for as we learn, in the course of the history, that Moses received from Jethro some valuable instructions in the art of government, he must have profited considerably during his residence in Midian, by the conversation and example of that prince. Thus was Moses trained in the school of practical wisdom and retirement for the great employment to which he was destined by the Divine decree.

Man would have called him to that office in the fulness of his zeal and the plenitude of his power, as a warrior and prince in Egypt; but Sovereign Wisdom suffered him to become an exile and a shepherd, wholly dependent upon the bounty of others, and completely mortified, not only to the ideas of personal distinction, but the very desire of

being chosen to deliver Israel. That Moses was become so unconcerned about the condition of his people as to feel no inclination to serve them, cannot be supposed for a moment without injury to his character. But he was now humbled in his own eyes, and deeply sensible of his many imperfections. The contemplative life which he led in Midian, had wrought a material change in his disposition and deportment. From being confident and impetuous, he was become mild and diffident, placid and courteous. To the princely attainments of his youth were added the mild virtues of a private and lowly station; patience under fatigue, submission to authority, and gentleness to his associates. In this course of discipline was the mind of Moses prepared for the opposition which he was to encounter in Egypt, and above all for the guidance of a refractory people through the wilderness. When he was become as nothing in his own estimation, he rose in the Divine favour; and while keeping the flock of Jethro in Horob, "the Angel Jchovah appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold the bush burned with fire: and the bush was not consumed." This appearance of the Shechinah as a lambent flame, preserving that which seemed devoted to instant destruction, was a striking emblem of the church in affliction. Moses beheld the sight with astonishment, and drew near to enquire into the cause of such an extraordinary phænomenon. But his curiosity received a check from the inhabitant of the refulgent glory, directing him to reverence the spot which was sanctified by the Divine presence. In the succeeding colloquy we are struck with the gracious condescension of the Almighty, and the diffident reluctance of his servant. No sooner was Moses made acquainted with the mystery of the blazing bush, and heard the voice of the Invisible amidst the

glorious brightness, than he immediately covered his face and was afraid. So far his behaviour was commendable, and becoming the creature holding communion with the Creator. The nearer we draw to the Source of perfection, the greater will be our dread of the Divine Majesty, and the deeper conviction shall we have of our own unworthiness. But Moses was filled with unbelieving fears when the Lord commanded him to return into Egypt, for the purpose of bringing his brethren out of captivity. There was a time when he would have gone forth with eagerness on such a mission; but now his language is, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh; and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" So long as man is under the influence of his passions, he feels confident of his powers; but when the Divine countenance shines into his heart, he trembles before the commandment of God, though it be accompanied by the promise of his grace. But as zeal, even in a good cause, may exceed the boundary of duty; so the spirit of humility will sometimes sink below it, into a state bordering on infidelity. In Moses we see both instances exemplified; the consequences of which were, that he was separated from Israel forty years; and when called, at last, to visit and deliver his brethren, nothing but the Divine terror could make him accept the trust. But if these circumstances show the imperfection of Moses, the insertion of them in the public records, drawn up by himself, must be considered a decisive proof of his integrity as an historian, and of his divine authority as a legislator. If the history had been only compiled to set forth the antiquity of the Hebrew nation, the wonderful manner of its deliverance, and the exalted character of the founder, such particulars as these would hardly have been related, especially as the scene in Horeb was without any human witness.

But nothing in this wonderful transaction is more entitled to our consideration than the ineffable name which was now revealed unto Moses. "And God said, I AM THAT I AM. And he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." This remarkable form runs in the original, literally, I AM WHO AM, which in the ancient Greek version is rendered I AM HE THAT IS, denoting in both the unchangeable and eternal Essence, "in whom we live, move, and have our being." The title appears to be paraphrastic of JAH, the patriarchal name of God; and the construction of it here, though expressed in the future, comprehends all time, and as such it was adopted emphatically by our Lord, for which he was treated as a blasphemer by the Jews, when he said, "Before Abraham was I AM."—John, viii. 58. But the meaning of the name and the Being by whom it was originally revealed, are thus fully declared and amplified in the last book of prophetic Scripture;—"I AM the ALPHA and the OMEGA, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, WHO AM, and WHO WAS and WHO IS TO COME, THE ALMIGHTY." Rev. i. 8.

FEBRUARY THE FIRST.

THE CALL OF AARON.

Exodus, iv. 27.—*And the Lord said to Aaron, Go into the wilderness to meet Moses. And he went and met him in the mount of God, and kissed him.*

THE same gracious Being who appeared in the luminous glory to Moses, upon Mount Horeb, and gave him authority to act in his name, for the deliverance of Israel, commanded Aaron to leave his

family in Egypt and go into the wilderness. It is worth while to consider a little the different behaviour of these eminent men, upon receiving the injunctions of the Almighty. Moses raised many objections against the appointment to which he was called; nor could the promise of support, and the assurance of ultimate success, though attended by miracles, overcome his scruples and bring him to obedience. The secluded state to which he had been long accustomed, possessed so many comforts, that nothing but the terror of the Lord could draw him from it to the discharge of more important duties. The contemplative life, excellent as it may be for the subjugation of the passions, is apt to create an indolent timidity of disposition, and, while it elevates the mind, fails to enlarge its sphere of usefulness. He who devotes himself wholly to retirement, is forgetful of the numerous claims which the present and future state of society may justly lay upon him; for the improvement of the heart is of little worth unless it be accompanied with the desire of doing good. Our continuance in this world is short enough, and the time taken up in the journey ought to be so employed as to leave some memorial that we have not lived in vain. There are snares in solitude as well as in society; and it is to be feared that some pious persons, out of an extreme anxiety to rise above earthly concerns, have been unmindful of their obligation to that Power who requires acts of mercy and benevolence rather than sacrifice. Moses, by his long residence in Midian, became so attached to the pastoral employment as apparently to have given up the desire of visiting his family in Egypt. That seclusion which was intended only for a state of preparation, he seems to have considered as an absolute settlement; and thus, what would have been in many the simplicity of virtuous content, was, under his peculiar circumstances, the spirit of disobedience. Aaron,

though he was three years older than his brother, and most probably had never been out of Egypt, neither hesitated when the word of the Lord commanded him to go into the wilderness, nor waited for an explanation of the injunction. The distance was very great, and the perils of the journey were numerous; besides which, he knew nothing of the particular call which had been given to Moses, nor was he at all acquainted with the occasion of his return after so long an absence. Aaron might have urged many excuses for not complying with the command, grounded on the advanced stage of his life, the danger and uncertainty of the way, the jealousy of the Egyptian government, and the alarm which his absence would produce among the Israelites. But none of these things moved this good man, or inclined him to murmur at the Divine order. It was sufficient for him to know that the voice of the Lord called him into the wilderness; and therefore, without pausing to consult flesh and blood, he arose and went out, well assured that the same Power who gave the mandate could protect and guide him in his course. In this ready obedience of Aaron we may discern the habitual piety of his character, and from it we may gather the influence which such a man must have had upon his afflicted brethren. That he stood high in their esteem is evident, and it is also clear that he was well known to Pharaoh; we may, therefore, well conclude that the residence of Aaron at the seat of government was providentially ordered to keep the true religion alive among his people. Thus graciously did Divine wisdom preserve one brother in Egypt and the other in Midian, for the same purpose, but without any co-operation till the appointed time, when they were brought together at the mount of God; "And Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord who had sent him, and all the signs which he had commanded him."

FEBRUARY THE SECOND.

THE COMPLAINT OF MOSES.

Exodus, v. 22, 23.—*Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil intreated this people? Why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all.*

HUMAN nature is so impatient, that the best of men are apt to complain when their expectations fail of success; and to feel dissatisfied if things take a different course from that which, in their judgment, would have been most conducive to the general good. Though convinced that the whole system is under the direction of Infinite Wisdom, and will be conducted to the great end of establishing the Divine glory in the happiness of innumerable beings, they lose sight of the universal object, by fixing their attention too much upon minute events. The evil which they behold on one spot, seems, in their narrow view, to cover the whole creation; and in their eagerness to vindicate the honour of God, they would pour out his vengeance at once upon the wicked, and effect the deliverance of the righteous by a signal display of the Divine power. Even the promises are sometimes regarded by the believer in such a partial and contracted view, that he is disappointed if they are not fulfilled in his own time, and agreeable to the circumstances which he conceives most proper for them. Instead of considering the vast and comprehensive scheme to which they relate, he is for cutting short the work, and bringing the whole to an issue within the sphere of his own confined observation. This narrow and erroneous principle has misled and perplexed pious minds in all ages, of which infidels have

taken a miserable advantage, by treating the sacred predictions with mockery, because they have not seen them accomplished. Instances of both characters occur in the opening of the Divine commission to the afflicted Israelites and their haughty oppressor. No sooner was the will of God made known to the former, but they received the promise with joy, and considered their deliverance as immediate: while, on the other hand, Pharaoh treated the message with contempt, and commanded the burdens of the people to be increased. This addition to their sufferings threw the wretched captives into a state of despondency, which made them accuse Moses and Aaron with being the authors of their wrongs. The feelings of the afflicted people were natural; but that Moses, to whom the obduracy of Pharaoh was expressly and repeatedly foretold, should have been so depressed on this occasion, excites astonishment. He seems to have strangely forgotten the declaration, that by mighty wonders only would the tyrant be compelled to let the children of Israel depart: and as yet not one sign had been displayed in his presence. Confounded at the new calamity, and deeply affected by the reproaches of the people, Moses in his retirement, instead of praying for the Divine counsel and support, utters the bitter language of complaint: "Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil intrusted this people? Why is it that thou hast sent me?" If the messenger of God had duly considered the nature and extent of the great concern in which he was engaged, the character of Pharaoh, and the fulness of the promise, which contained judgment as well as mercy, he would not have fallen into this state of unbelief. But he has himself recorded the fact, to show that nothing but the Divine goodness and power could have effected this great salvation.

The Israelites were not only weak and timid, but the instrument appointed for their deliverance was

irresolute and ready to abandon the work at the very commencement of his mission. Under all these circumstances mighty signs and wonders were as necessary for the instruction of the people of God, as for the confusion of their enemies; equally proper to strengthen the faith of Moses, and to punish the wickedness of Pharaoh. The same lesson is still inculcated in the dispensations of Providence, which, however terrible, are so many merciful calls upon men to learn righteousness, and to submit their minds entirely to the will of God. When his thunders shake the nations, the small still voice of peace thus addresses his chosen people: "Therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you; and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment, blessed are all they that wait for him." Isaiah, xxx. 18.

FEBRUARY THE THIRD.

THE OBSTINACY OF PHARAOH.

Exodus, vii. 4.—But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, and my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments.

WHEN Moses complained that the Lord had not delivered his people, instead of being reproved for the impatience of his spirit, he received a renewal of the promise. This declaration was amplified by an appeal to the original covenant, which assured to the children of Israel the heritage of their fathers. "And God said, I am the Lord; and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty; but by my name, JEHOVAH,

was I not known to them." Now since this very name frequently occurs in the patriarchal history, and as the father of the faithful applied it with a very striking adjunct to the spot where he offered his son, it is certain that the word could not have been unknown to his descendants. The difficulty, however, if it be one, is easily cleared up, by reading the words interrogatively: "Did I appear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by EL SHADDAI, or God Almighty; and by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them?" This construction not only preserves the harmony of the sacred history, but gives peculiar strength and beauty to the question or passage itself. It may then be considered as having the following application: "If the God of power was the protector of the patriarchs; and if also as the immutable and self-existent Being, who is the fulfiller of his promises, he guided them through their pilgrimage in the land wherein they were strangers, will he not also accomplish his word, by which he engaged to establish his covenant with their seed for ever?" Such is the obvious force and meaning of this appeal, by which Moses is called upon to prepare Israel for the coming of their Saviour in great power and majesty, to deliver them from their enemies.

But the people could not receive the word of consolation, for which the reason is compassionately assigned, that they were straitened by the anguish of their minds. Affliction had broken their spirits; and they who believed with joy, when it was said that the Lord had visited them, now refused to be comforted by his express promise. The gracious work, however, went steadily on, notwithstanding the violence of external opposition and internal weakness. A charge was given to the elders of Israel, and the families were properly distinguished and arranged, though to outward observation there were as yet no signs of deliverance. This disposition of the people,

according to their respective tribes and houses, being compacted, "the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh; and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet." We read of no more murmuring on the part of the chosen messenger, who, with this commission, as the vicegerent of Heaven, received that measure of the Spirit, accompanied by the full assurance of faith, which rendered him superior to all fear, and gave him might to stand with confidence against the powers of darkness. But it was again imparted to him, that nothing short of the immediate interposition of the Almighty could prove effectual for the deliverance of Israel. Signs and wonders must, however, be multiplied in the sight of Pharaoh and upon the land of Egypt, though Moses was expressly told that even these should not succeed; for "Pharaoh," saith the Lord, "will not hearken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, and my people the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, by great judgments." It might seem strange to be sent with repeated demands to one of whom it was previously known that he would not only disregard them, but even contend against the miracles by which they were enforced. The servant of God well knew that the series of wonders which he was empowered to perform in the presence of Pharaoh, would have no other effect upon the tyrant than that of hardening his heart. But Moses had now perfectly learned the duty of obedience; and without making any farther resistance or complaint, he went forth with holy boldness, leaving the issue to God. He who discerneth the hearts of men, saw in the mind of Pharaoh that determined malignity of infidelity, which, out of a natural hatred to truth, becomes more obstinate by conviction and impenitent under judgment. That he was wicked by compulsion, and reprobate by necessity, cannot be supposed without

injury to the purity of the Divine character. It is indeed said, that God hardened his heart; but this did not take place till Pharaoh was become obdurate by his wilful opposition to the Divine decrees. All the signs which he beheld, and the scourges inflicted upon him, served only to heighten his impiety; and thus the visitations of God may be truly said to have hardened the heart of this unbeliever. That such men are sometimes raised to the government of mighty nations; or rather, that in the continual fluctuation of human affairs, minds of extraordinary capacity and enormity obtain an ascendancy which gives them the means of doing great mischief, is proved by abundance of facts in antient and modern history. These, like all other evils, occur not from any actual or direct appointment of the Almighty; but according to that natural order and course of things by which the overflowing of wickedness punishes those who have most contributed to its increase, and thus, without intending any such thing, it serves to promote the glory of God.

FEBRUARY THE FOURTH.

DEFEAT OF THE MAGICIANS.

Exodus, viii. 19.—*Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God.*

THE same Being who wrought the least of the wonders which preceded the departure of Israel from Egypt, could have brought out his people by the immediate infliction of some signal judgment upon their oppressors. But it was necessary to display the sovereignty of Jehovah over the universe, as well for the confusion of those who put their trust in imaginary deities, as for the permanent instruction of the,

chosen seed. Pharaoh treated the God of the Hebrews as a mere tutelary divinity; and judging, with the usual ignorance of superstition, from mere outward appearances, he equally despised both them and the object of their worship. In his estimation that Power must be weak which left its votaries for so long a time in abject slavery; and having himself the highest opinion of his wise men, he was willing to make the trial whether they who were deeply acquainted with the secrets of nature, could not vanquish the messengers of this unknown God. The readiness with which these sorcerers obeyed the commands of the monarch, increased his confidence; and though the event of the contest was made to appear in the symbolical victory of Aaron's rod, the tyrant became blind to conviction and bent upon resistance. Early in the morning Pharaoh went, according to his usual custom, to pay his devotions to the sacred river. But the servants of God were there before him; and after delivering their message, without effect, they proceeded to execute the Divine judgment upon the favourite deity of the Egyptians. While Pharaoh stood upon the bank of the Nile, surrounded by his courtiers, Aaron lifted up his rod, at the word of Moses, and instantly the river became blood; so stinking and putrescent that the fish died, and the people were driven to the greatest distress for want of water. The magicians appear to have been in the train of Pharaoh when this blow was given to their religion. But instead of submitting to the Power thus triumphant over an element in which they placed divine virtue; these deceivers attempted a similar change upon some streams in the neighbourhood, and were permitted to succeed, as they were in the imitation of the next miracle, when the same river poured forth the plague of frogs. Thus the magicians became instrumental in the production of miseries, which they could neither lessen nor re-

move; and owing to the madness ever attendant upon obstinate error, in opposing truth, they contributed to their own disgrace, and to the sufferings of their employer. Pharaoh, however, was hardened by these exploits, though, when he smarted so severely from the aggravation of the calamity brought upon the land, he could obtain no relief in the arts on which he relied. Here we see that the leading design of these wonders was to display the majesty of Jehovah, by rendering the pretended deities of Egypt noisome and pestilential to their infatuated votaries; while those men, who were held in the greatest veneration on account of their superior wisdom and supposed sanctity of character, served only to make the triumph more complete by bringing contempt upon the objects of their adoration. Extraordinary as the performances of the magicians might be, they were limited to those particulars, success in which, must have made them odious in the estimation of the people, who saw that an over-ruling Power turned their enchantments against themselves. Yet they who could convert rods into serpents and water into blood, were incapable of reversing those prodigies; for though they brought frogs from the Nile, it was out of their power to keep them from infesting the king's palace. The wicked by their ingenuity may produce much mischief, by impeding the progress of righteousness, and confirming men in impiety; but it will be seen at last that their labours only add to the mass of human folly; and they who have been most deluded by them, will be obliged to confess, that in magnifying the glory of deceivers they have increased their own misery. Pharaoh's wise men did some great things; but when they came to show their skill in that which was comparatively little, the boundary was fixed, and they could go no farther. When the dust of the earth, another object of reverence in the Egyptian theology, was changed

into swarms of noxious vermin, the magicians assayed in vain to produce what they held in detestation. Such were their notions of external defilement, that whoever discovered one of these insects upon him, was obliged to perform several ablutions. To the superstitious minds of the Egyptians, therefore, nothing could be more abominable than this plague, which spread universally upon man and beast. By this last expression we are probably to understand the sacred animals, which, according to the custom of that country, were kept with the utmost care and respect in the temples. Now that the magicians should endeavour to copy this miracle, and thus disseminate a pollution considered by themselves as most detestable, can only be ascribed to that perverse spirit, which, in the prosecution of its evil purposes, is blind to its own shame, and regardless of all consequences. But the curse was already complete, for "all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt." The magicians perceiving that their power was at an end, and that they could neither check this loathsome visitation nor divert the attention of the monarch and his people from the disgrace which it brought upon them, "said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God." They saw the hand of the Almighty writing their judgment in the dust of the earth; thus mingling the most shocking mortifications to pride with the enjoyments of life; and constituting the most despicable creatures instruments of Divine vengeance. This will ever be the case with those who make idols of worldly things; and instead of submitting to the righteousness of God, trust in the arm of flesh; "sacrificing unto their net, and burning incense unto their drag." Hab. i. 16. But however high they may be exalted in their own imaginations, and in the esteem of others, the time is coming when the vanities in which they delight shall become poison, and they will look in vain for help

from the destroyer. In the day of visitation the voice of judgment will pronounce this sentence: "Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not." Isa. lxvi. 3, 4.

FEBRUARY THE FIFTH.

THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT.

Exodus, ix. 20, 21.—He that feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh, made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses: and he that regarded not the word of the Lord, left his servants and his cattle in the field.

AMONG other advantages produced by the long residence of Israel in Egypt, and by the miracles which distinguished their deliverance from bondage, may be reckoned the conversion of many of the native inhabitants, and an extensive diffusion of the fundamental truth that there is one Supreme Divinity who ruleth over all the powers of nature.

During the abode of the chosen people in Goshen, they must have made known several important particulars concerning their history, and especially their prevalent expectation of a mighty Saviour, which could not fail to excite the attention of serious and inquisitive minds. When, therefore, the mission of Moses, on their behalf, became generally known, and the judgments inflicted by him severely felt, many of the Egyptians could not fail to be convinced that the national deities were unable to contend

with the omnipotence of Jehovah. And this was actually the case ; for, notwithstanding the obstinate impiety of Pharaoh, there were not wanting some among his servants who feared the word of the Lord. They had seen the boasted wisdom of the magicians and priests turned into contempt ; the daily object of their devotion exhibiting a dreadful testimony against the abominations with which it was defiled, by human sacrifices ; and instead of fertilizing the land, sending out immense shoals of troublesome creatures ; first, infesting the houses night and day by their croaking ; and, lastly, poisoning the air by the stench of their carcases. The EARTH also, to which divine honours were paid, was made to rebuke the folly of the idolaters, by covering them with filthy vermin ; the very presence of which was to them a pollution. Thus they received chastisement from the very elements which they worshipped ; and as this spirit of superstition went to the extreme length of deifying noxious reptiles and the cattle of the field ; the former were sent in a prodigious mixture, and the latter afflicted by a grievous murrain.

The AIR was another of the primary deities which the Egyptians were taught, by their priests and wise men, to consider as the great source of their blessings ; and whose favour they supplicated by daily offerings and various religious services. To punish them for this gross ascription of divinity to the creature instead of the Creator, and to show that the weakest means could contaminate the object of their adoration, the messenger of God was commanded to sprinkle ashes towards heaven ; and instantly inflammatory tumours burst forth upon the Egyptians, so that the magicians could not stand before Moses. This is the last time we read of these deceivers, who seem to have retired in confusion from the unequal contest, especially when one of their own rites was turned against themselves ; for it was

usual with them to burn persons alive upon a high altar, and then to scatter the ashes of the unfortunate victims in the air, to secure a blessing upon the nation. This judgment, therefore, which was inflicted by ashes taken from the furnaces where the Israelites laboured, could not be misunderstood by the Egyptians, who beheld the same ceremony, which they were accustomed to regard with savage delight, converted into the means of punishing their inhumanity and impiety. But though Pharaoh was frightened by these visitations, which were intelligible signs of the Divine displeasure against idolatry and cruelty, he became more obdurate on the removal of each calamity. Nor let this instance of hardened infidelity be matter of surprize; for who does not see in his daily acquaintance with mankind, many persons upon whom the terrors of judgment, and the calls of mercy, fail in producing any other effect than that of a little momentary concern, which vanishes with the occasion that gave it birth? While, however, the king of Egypt and his courtiers forgot their recent alarms, and slighted the denunciation of future evils, some of the inhabitants feared the word of the Lord, and profited by their attention to the warning given by Moses.

We have seen three of the deified elements acting separately as the instruments of vengeance upon their besotted worshippers; but now they are united with unexampled fury, pouring destruction upon man and beast, besides cutting off the fruits of the earth. Particular reverence was paid to fire and water in that country; for both were considered as pure, eternal, and living principles; great, therefore, must have been the astonishment of the Egyptians to see these elements descending from heaven, and spreading devastation throughout that part of the land where these powers were idolized, while the province of Goshen was free from the tempest. Thus a division

was made, not only between the idolaters and the objects of their persecution, but even some of the Egyptians themselves escaped the ravages of the storm, by "fearing the word of the Lord." The house of Pharaoh was not so utterly abandoned, but that it contained a few, at least, who acknowledged the true God, and were obedient to his word. Instead of following the example of the monarch, they hearkened to the merciful declaration which he despised, and they properly evinced their belief in the verity and power of Jehovah, by making their servants and cattle flee into the houses. Though this may seem to have been no more than a prudent concern for their property, the language of the sacred historian clearly indicates that it resulted from the principle of religion; for a strong and characteristic distinction is drawn between these persons, "as fearing God," and those who "regarded him not."

From the narrative we learn that in the darkest times, and amidst the most depraved manners, the Almighty will not be without witnesses to his praise; and that however corrupted any nation may be, he knoweth them who are his; of whose preservation he will take particular care in the day of visitation. To this end Pharaoh received public intimation of the succeeding plague; which monition proved, indeed, ineffectual upon his impenitent heart, nor was it more attended to by those who copied the fashion of the court. But they who believed were delivered from this miraculous outrage of the elements, and thus afforded another striking proof that in all his judgments the Lord remembereth mercy, and will provide a sure defence for those who trust in his righteousness and embrace the terms of his great salvation.

FEBRUARY THE SIXTH.

THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT.

Exodus, x. 16, 17.—*Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the Lord your God, that he may take away from me this death only.*

THE alternate fears and arrogance, submission and impenitence, of Pharaoh, display most forcibly the characteristics of every proud sinner who trembles under the Divine dispensations, and supplicates deliverance, without feeling any real sorrow for the occasion of them. When the storm ceases, his infidelity returns, and his heart becomes more hardened by the recollection of its former terrors. With the apprehensions of danger, his resolutions of repentance vanish, and thus, by an habitual course of abusing mercies and disregarding judgments, he brings himself into a reprobate state, both living and dying, as if he either thought there is no God, or, which amounts to the same thing, that in the Divine estimation righteousness and iniquity are equal. In the midst of the plague of hail the Egyptian king was frightened, and promised, upon the cessation of the destructive tempest, to let the children of Israel immediately depart from his dominions. But no sooner did the heaven recover its serenity, than the gloomy mind of the tyrant sunk into its wonted malignity, and became more insensible than ever to the tremendous visitations of the Almighty. When the plague of locusts was denounced, he continued unmoved, till the alarmed minds of his courtiers, who knew that desolation and famine would be the result of such a calamity, obliged him to call Moses and Aaron again

into his presence. Still the obstinacy of this infatuated monarch was neither to be subdued by the remonstrances of his counsellors, nor the certainty of the impending judgment. Rather than submit wholly to the demand of Jehovah, who would have the complete liberty of his people, young and old, Pharaoh was determined to sacrifice the welfare of his own people. But when the destroying army of locusts had completed the work of devastation, by consuming all that had been left after the former plagues, he was awakened to a sight of the misery which his rebellion against the Lord had brought upon the land. His language to Moses and Aaron, on this occasion, was apparently penitential, so that an ordinary observer would have supposed that his heart was now become perfectly subdued and ready to yield all that should be required of him. That penitence, however, took its flight with the locusts; and these creatures left not a more frightful waste behind them, in Egypt, than what was exhibited in the mind of the sovereign. Every warning having been slighted, and every promise violated, on the part of this man, the Divine messenger was ordered to stretch forth his hand towards heaven, which was followed by a thick darkness over all the land of Egypt, except the province of Goshen, where the children of Israel dwelt, who had light in their dwellings. So dreadful was this darkness, which lasted three days, that it might be even felt, and the Egyptians could not discern each other. The great propriety of this miracle will appear, if we consider that the celestial luminaries were the principal deities of that country, and that even day and night were there worshipped as substantial beings. This punishment was, therefore, a convincing proof of the extreme folly of these idolaters; and was designed, no doubt, to show them and the Israelites that there is but one Supreme Intelligence, to whose will all

the creatures owe their existence and direction. In this, as well as in the former manifestations of his power, he pronounced the solemn decree: "I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no god besides me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil. I the Lord do all these things." Isa. xlv. 5—7.

They who exalted the creature above the Creator, were not merely guilty of a speculative error, in ascribing divine honours to the works of God; but they expressed this belief by practices the most outrageous to humanity, in paying such services to the objects of their adoration as were repugnant to every idea of reason and justice. Their temples were scenes of the most offensive abominations; and their public festivals were distinguished by horrible murders committed in the name of religion. In this great contest, therefore, the majesty of Jehovah was not only displayed over all the imaginary deities of heathenism, but the immutable principle of righteousness shone conspicuous in the triumph of persecuted truth over the powers of darkness. The contemplation of this miracle, which confounded the opposers of the Divine glory, and filled their polluted fanes with horror, carries the mind forward to that awful scene on the Mount, when the victory of the Redeemer was preceded by "darkness over all the earth, from the sixth to the ninth hour; and the sun was darkened, and the vail of the temple was rent in the midst." Luke, xxiii. 44, 45.

FEBRUARY THE SEVENTH.

THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT.

Exodus, xi. 3.—*And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians.*

MANY occurrences are related in the sacred history, which, considered by themselves, and without due regard being paid to the particular circumstances under which they happened, will appear harsh and unjust, contrary to the mild spirit of religion, and consequently utterly unworthy of his character by whose order they are said to have been performed. Of this kind is the relation that the Lord gave his people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, by disposing the latter to bestow upon them “jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment.” This made part of the prescript, or promise, originally communicated to Moses in the mount; it was repeated after the plague of darkness, and became fully accomplished in the readiness with which the Egyptians gave to the Israelites all that they required at their departure. Thus much for the injunction and the fact; upon which cavilling minds have raised objections against the Divine authority of the Hebrew legislator. Frivolous as these may be, it is proper to clear up and explain this portion of the history; for though the character of Moses is very easily vindicated from the charge of injustice in this instance, the reason of the direction given to the Israelites has not perhaps been very generally understood. Our translators have committed an error in the text, which has certainly occasioned considerable perplexity, and led to some mistakes in the interpretation of the command. The word translated, “to borrow,” literally means, “to ask or demand;” and as such it is rendered in all the ancient versions; and

instead of, "they lent unto them," the reading should be, "they let them have." By thus correcting the passages where this incident is related, according to the exact import of the original, the main attack proves nugatory; and they who make it, will consequently appear, notwithstanding all their presumption, "both ignorant of what they say, and whereof they affirm." But it may still be asked, why the children of Israel demanded these things, and how the Egyptians came so readily to grant their valuable jewels to an undisciplined and unarmed people, whose faces they were not likely to see any more? Many solutions of these questions might be given; the most material and satisfactory appear to be those which follow. The children of Israel came into Egypt, not as a conquered people, but under very honourable circumstances to themselves, and advantageous terms to the country where they were invited to settle. They quitted Canaan at the desire of the Egyptian government, and obtained the province of Goshen as a settlement; for which they rendered many important services to the nation. At length their descendants becoming numerous, one of the monarchs of Egypt, with the advice of his council, committed a flagrant violation of justice, by bringing those useful strangers under the yoke of abject slavery. Their usage was indeed most intolerable, and such as could not have been justified to captives taken in war, or even subdued revolters, in times when humanity, in such cases, was but little regarded.

When Moses came forward in the name of the Lord, and required the deliverance of his people, Pharaoh opposed the demand by denying the existence of any such Being as the one who now assumed the sovereignty of Israel. The unbelieving tyrant carried on the contest with unparalleled obstinacy and malignity, resolved to see whether he and his national

gods would not ultimately defeat this unknown Divinity, whose power occasionally made him tremble, but whose means of annoyance he thought would be either exhausted or counteracted. To us this may appear a very extraordinary warfare, and one which was marked as much by folly as impiety; but if we look into the infancy of human society, and examine the condition of Egypt itself, which has been called the cradle of nations, our wonder at this conduct of Pharaoh will cease. There we perceive a mystagogical system, composed of all the material bodies and visible forms of nature. Such a creed, to minds uninformed by revelation, might indeed appear specious, and the services it enjoined adapted to avert evil and procure good, by propitiating those powers which were supposed to be inherent in the elements, and to protect those who placed their trust in them. Hence these antient idolaters were accustomed to use various ornaments, fashioned under certain configurations of the heavens: and devoted to particular divinities, according to the superstitious fancy of the wearer. Two things then were designed in this spoliation of the Egyptians: one was, that some remuneration should be made to the Israelites for their long and painful services; and the other, to distinguish the victory which Jehovah had obtained by granting to them the spoils of his and their enemies. Let it be considered that this people had not the means of enforcing their demand; for though considerable in number, they were feeble in strength, and pusillanimous in spirit; so that nothing short of the same power which effected their departure, could have preserved them from the perils of the journey that lay before them. The Egyptians were a formidable nation, and might have resisted this requisition, if the authority which directed the one to ask, had not compelled the heads of the oppressors to bestow what in their estimation was now of no further use

to them, since the powers to whom they were consecrated could no longer defend their votaries from destruction.

FEBRUARY THE EIGHTH.

INSTITUTION OF THE PASSOVER.

Exodus, xii. 26, 27.—It shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? that ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped.

So remarkable an institution, and one attended with such extraordinary services as the passover, could not fail to excite the curiosity of those who were required to keep it, even to the latest generation.

Though a feast upon a sacrifice, it was to be celebrated by houses or families; and the lamb, or kid, eaten with bitter herbs, after a solemn preparation of the guests and the victim. These circumstances, with the sprinkling of blood, would naturally occasion inquiry concerning the origin of the custom, and the rationale of the ceremonial. An express injunction, therefore, accompanied the establishment of the rite, that in every succeeding age the Israelites should carefully acquaint their children with the fact to which it had a reference, and to explain, as far as the history enabled them, the peculiarities by which it was distinguished. This institution then was graciously appointed, not only for a perpetual memorial of the great deliverance to which it originally related, but, in a religious view, to preserve constantly in the minds of these people a deep reverence

of that supreme Power, to whom alone they were indebted for their civil and religious privileges. Now as it was hardly probable that they should perform the solemnities belonging to this high festival, without considering the various wonders to which all its parts alluded; so it was impossible that a proper review of the whole history could be attended with any other than profound gratitude to the Author of such signal mercies. But there were some obscurities in the ritual relating to the passover, which could not be cleared up by any particulars in the temporal deliverance of Israel; for though the unleavened bread and bitter herbs might aptly enough figure the bread of affliction, and the excessive sufferings to which that people were doomed in the house of bondage; yet the real reason for sprinkling the sacrificial blood was still involved in mystery. The choice of a lamb of the first year, and the command not to break one of its bones, were also particular and minute precepts, apparently beneath the dignity of Divine legislation, and far from receiving any illustration in the circumstances under which they were imparted. In the former judgments a division was made between the province of Goshen and the rest of Egypt, without any previous instructions being given to the chosen people; but in this last and greatest of all the plagues, they were required to exhibit on the doorposts of their houses the blood of the lamb, as that which would alone cause the destroying angel to pass over them. Now certainly the same Power which separated and preserved them in the preceding visitations, could as easily have passed by their houses in the present instance; nor needed he any such symbol by which to be guided in discriminating between the objects of mercy and those of vengeance. It is true, that after the Exodus some alterations took place in the manner of celebrating this ordinance, but without affecting in the least degree its substance.

Though the blood was no longer sprinkled on the lintels, it was carefully collected in a basin, and poured out at the altar; and the guests, in feasting upon this sacrifice, used a sitting instead of a travelling posture. But the quality of the paschal lamb, with the particular rules for slaying and eating it, remained invariable as a statute to be observed by the children of Israel in all their generations; which decree implied a limit in the duration of the service to the period when, by the termination of the theocracy, the generations of Israel should be completed. This brings us to the true object represented under the passover, and to the time when all the typical ceremonies which distinguished that sacrament, were actually realized in his sufferings, "who once in the end of the world appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Heb. ix. 26. By the end of the world, in this place, is signified the completion of the Jewish economy, when "Christ, our passover, was sacrificed for us;" at which time the veil of the temple was rent in twain, to show that the ceremonial law was now finished, in the offering of the "Lamb of God, who came to take away the sins of the world." Every thing in the original ordinance had a reference to this great sacrifice, and was fulfilled to the most scrupulous degree of literal exactness. As the paschal lamb was to be taken out of the flock, so was Christ of the family of Israel; "being partaker of flesh and blood, and made in all things like unto his brethren." Heb. ii. 17.

The victim under the law was to be perfect; so was Christ "a Lamb without blemish, and without spot; and being perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." 1 Pet. i. 19. Heb. v. 9. The lamb was to be slain in the congregation of Israel, and in like manner was the Messiah cut off in the very midst of his people; and even devoted to death by them. "His blood,"

said they, "be upon us and upon our children." The express command not to break a bone of the paschal lamb, however trivial it might seem, was a prophetic sign, and had its accomplishment; when, contrary to all usage in such cases, the soldiers "seeing that Jesus was dead, brake not his legs: but one of them with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water." John, xix. 33, 34.

Other coincidences may be pointed out between the passover and that of which it was a type; with respect to the place and time, the manner and effects of the ordinance. After the establishment of Israel, the paschal lamb was slain at Jerusalem, where also our Lord was cut off for the sins of his people; and that at the exact period when the feast was celebrated. As the Israelites were secured from the destroyer, by the sign of blood, so are we delivered from eternal death only through "Christ, who was once offered to bear the sins of many." Heb. ix. 28. The institution of the passover immediately preceded the departure of Israel from a state of captivity; and the sacrifice of the Messiah wrought out eternal redemption for those who were under spiritual bondage; so that from henceforth "all who believe in him are brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Rom. viii. 21. With the passover a new style commenced, which might be called the era of freedom; and thus, when the Redeemer proclaimed the acceptable year of the Lord, by fulfilling the prophecies, and bringing in a better covenant, he says, "Behold, I make all things new." Rev. xxi. 5.

The whole of the paschal lamb was to be eaten or consumed, and that in the family to which it belonged; so Christ saith, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." John, vi. 53, 54. This union with

Christ is only to be obtained and preserved by communion with his church; and he who departs from thence, forfeits these privileges and becomes an alien, which was figured in this, that no stranger or uncircumcised person was to partake of the passover.

Lastly, leaven is frequently and severely prohibited to those who were admitted to this solemn feast, which also had a mystic allusion, and was intended to point out the necessity of sincerity in those who come to Christ; for, according to the language of Scripture, leaven is the symbol of hypocrisy. To this agrees the apostolical explication of the ancient sacrament: "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven; neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

FEBRUARY THE NINTH.

DESTRUCTION OF THE FIRST-BORN.

Exodus, xii. 30 — And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt: for there was not a house where there was not one dead.

THIS last and terrible judgment which fell upon the Egyptian nation, was not inflicted without a warning; but though the denunciation was more particular and awful than any before delivered to Pharaoh, it only provoked the anger of the monarch, who drove the messenger of God with menaces from his presence. There is, however, some confusion in the history as it stands in our version, owing to the transposition of two verses, from the eleventh to the tenth chapter, and the wrong construction of the pas-

sage which describes the last interview of Moses with Pharaoh. According to the common reading, Moses had his last audience of the king, after the plague of darkness; instead of which, we find him giving the inflexible tyrant an explicit notice of the death of the first-born. To rectify this apparent contradiction, we should remove the two verses just mentioned, from the place where they have no connexion, and insert them at the end of the last declaration to Pharaoh : in which case the order of the narrative will stand as follows :
 “ And Moses said, Thus saith the Lord, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt; and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh, that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the first-born of the maid-servant that is behind the mill, and all the first-born of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel, shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast : that ye may know, how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel. And all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee; and after that I will go out.—And Pharaoh said unto him, Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die. And Moses said, Thou hast epoken well, I will see thy face again no more.”

By reading the narrative in this order, the harmony is preserved, and the final scene is heightened in solemnity. But there is one passage which requires some attention. It is said, “ And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger :” which account is inconsistent with the character of Moses, and certainly unbecoming his high station. If he had been thus angry, something of passion would have appeared in his language; which, however, was firm and tem-

perate, dignified and respectful. The deportment of Pharaoh, on the other hand, was violent, and his fury exceeded what he had displayed on former occasions; so that the words, as applied to him, are perfectly descriptive. To him indeed they truly belong; and thus the whole passage ought to be read: "And Moses said, Thou hast spoken well; I will see thy face again no more. And he went out from Pharaoh, who was heated with anger."

It remains now to consider the judgment which Moses denounced, and the infatuated monarch disregarded, till the weight of the stroke roused him and the whole nation to a sight of unparalleled misery. Among the Egyptians the priesthood and primogeniture always went together; so that the first-born, or eldest son of every family, was consecrated in natural course to the service of the respective deities. We have seen the barbarous policy of the Egyptian government, in sacrificing the innocent children of the Hebrews to the river-god; which act of impiety and inhumanity was now to be visited with just and ample vengeance on the first-born of the oppressors. This dreadful and universal ruin was a deadly blow at the root of that superstition, which not only opposed the true God, but persecuted his worshippers. It completed the triumph of Jehovah over the Egyptian deities, by cutting off instantaneously all who were devoted to their service. Thus was Egypt deprived of its boasted strength and excellence, and the hereditary conservators of religion and learning, law and government, were swept off in a moment by the angel of destruction. The hour of this tremendous visitation was peculiarly awful; it was at midnight, when the inhabitants were reposing on their beds, and unconscious of any danger. Pharaoh indeed was forewarned of the stroke; but instead of giving him alarm, it seems to have aggravated his infidelity. But he who went to sleep in

fancied security, was suddenly awakened at midnight by a horrible outcry, which was heard in every direction. It was the custom in Egypt, when any person died, for the surviving friends to rush into the streets, uttering loud lamentations: what a scene then must this have been, when from every house issued groupes of mourners, who, instead of meeting with the assistance or condolence of friends, found that the same cause of grief prevailed in every family? The cry of death was universal, from the cottage to the palace; and the measure of the judgment was uniformly the same, being the prime and glory of every family. This vengeance was too particular and definite to be misunderstood. Every Egyptian became sensible from whence his affliction proceeded, and on whose account; therefore all were anxious to send the Israelites away; even Pharaoh himself, though not conscious of his guilt, shared in the general feeling, and urged with impatience the immediate and unconditional departure of this people. Such was the display of the Divine sovereignty, in bringing out the chosen seed from the house of bondage, without the instrumentality of his servant, agreeably to his own declaration; "Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord."

The unknown writer of the Book of Wisdom hath the following pious and beautiful meditations on this chain of miracles:

"Without these might they have fallen down with one blast, being punished with vengeance, and scattered abroad through the breath of thy power: but thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight. For thou canst show thy great strength at all times when thou wilt, and who may withstand the power of thine arm? For the whole world before thee is as a little grain of the balance; yea, as a drop of the morning dew that falleth down upon the earth." *Wisd. xi. 20, 22.*

FEBRUARY THE TENTH.

THE PILLAR OF CLOUD AND FIRE.

Exodus, xiii. 21, 22.—*And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, to go by day and night. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.*

THE deliverance of the Israelites from slavery would have been of no advantage, unless the same Divine Power, who pitied their sufferings, and brought them out of the house of bondage, had guided and protected them in their course. Great as the wisdom and integrity of Moses might be, his knowledge and virtue would have answered but little purpose, in leading a numerous and an undisciplined body through the trackless desert, having in their rear an irritated foe, while on every hand they were exposed to the constant attacks of active and formidable tribes. Of themselves this people were unable to contend with the dangers which lay before them, being wholly unaccustomed to the exercise of arms, and ready on the slightest appearance of an enemy to fall into a state of despondency, or to mutiny against their leaders. Such was the arduous situation of Moses, and the condition of the people under his care, after their departure from Ramesses, which was another name for Goshen. In addition to their difficulties, they were accompanied by a mixed multitude, consisting probably of persons who, having witnessed the wonders in Egypt, justly considered the children of Israel as the objects of a particular Providence, and therefore chose to cast in their lot with the people of God. But whatever might be their original motives, it is certain that some

of them at least proved a snare in the wilderness, by setting the Israelites against their daily food; and it is not unlikely that the project of the golden calf originated with these Egyptians.

Thus the Church, in her progress through the wilderness of this world, has in her external communion a mixed multitude, who admire the miraculous manner in which she was founded, and her general economy; but who are unacquainted with that inward grace, which constitutes her real excellence. At the appearance of trouble they are the first to fall away; and however much they may be disposed to praise religion as a profession, they feel little or nothing of its power in their hearts. In the time of persecution, therefore, or when any temptation comes in their way, these persons shrink from the trial; and say to the Church, in the language of the wondering daughters of Jerusalem, "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?" Song, v. 9. Contemplating Moses with such a heavy burthen upon his hands, and at the head of this various assemblage, we may be inclined, perhaps, to excuse his conduct in Horeb, when he said, "Who am I, that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" But the same supernatural fire which blazed around the bush without consuming any of its branches or leaves, now appeared to conduct the armies of Israel by day and by night. The two forms which this visible glory assumed, were graciously adapted to the security and comfort of the chosen people; in their peculiar circumstances. As a cloud, in the day, it tempered the atmosphere, and allayed the scorching heat of the solar rays; the action of which, in that climate, is exceedingly oppressive and attended with danger. During the night-season this miraculous cloud became luminous; and as the lambent flame preserved, instead of destroying the bush, so this celestial fire defended the camp of the Israelites from the as-

saults of their enemies and the ravages of wild beasts.

This was a miraculous symbol of the Divine presence; for Jehovah was in the cloud, guiding the church of Israel by his glory, and protecting it by his power. Without some such visible interposition of the Deity the people must have perished, surrounded as they were by foes, and continually disposed to fall into idolatrous connexions. But He who brought them out of Egypt, would neither leave them nor forsake them. "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them : in his love and in his pity he redeemed them ; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." Isa. lxiii. 9. This prefigured the incarnation of the Word, who now veiled himself under the cloud, from whence he delivered his precepts, and wrought miracles for his people. In due time the same Divine Person, who "was the brightness of his Father's glory" (Heb. i. 3), assumed the human nature, in which he "preached liberty to the captives, opened the prison doors to those who were bound, and proclaimed the acceptable year of the Lord." Isa. lxi. 1. Though the manifestation of the Divine glory was always in the front of the camp, it did in effect surround the people ; for the Psalmist says, "The Lord spread out a cloud for a covering in the day, and fire to give light in the night-season." Ps. cv. 39. It protected them equally on all sides, but was only to be seen in the front of the camp ; that the people, perceiving no security behind them, might have their attention constantly directed to the promised land. In like manner the great Leader and Encloser of the church goes before her in the path of holy obedience, saying to all who are in her communion, "This is the way, walk ye in it." The different appearances of the Divine presence to Israel, shadowed the two-fold nature of the Redeemer, who in the

cloud of humanity is an example to believers ; while, in his essential Divinity, or the fire of his glory, they have righteousness and strength. The influence of the one, and the power of the other, will never fail on the earth, till the perfection of the church, by the accession of the Gentiles and the restoration of Israel, shall be completed. Thus runs the promise, in the nature of a covenant, ratified by the Messiah, and firm as the foundation of the everlasting hills :

“ And the Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night : for upon all the glory shall be a defence. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the day-time from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.” Isa. iv. 5, 6.

FEBRUARY THE ELEVENTH.

PASSAGE OF THE RED SEA.

Exodus, xiv. 31.—*And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians : and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses.*

WHEN the Israelites quitted Goshen, their Divine Leader did not bring them by the nearest route to the promised land ; for which this reason is assigned in the history, lest, being unexperienced in military affairs, they should have been disheartened on encountering the warlike nations of Canaan.

The same mighty hand, however, which brought them out of the house of bondage, could as easily have made all opposition fall before them in the direct line of their march. But the Almighty had

other purposes to accomplish ; and, therefore, instead of conducting his people immediately to the land flowing with milk and honey, he caused them to take another course, and to pass from one desert to another. All this was contrary to the management of human wisdom ; and if Moses had not been under the direction of Heaven, he must inevitably have failed in his enterprise. What was still more extraordinary, after reaching the wilderness of Etham, where they might have been safe from a pursuing army, the fugitives suddenly received orders to make a retrograde movement ; and turning downwards on the coast of the Red Sea, they pitched their camp in a place which was enclosed on all sides, with a vengeful enemy pressing on their rear. Viewing these proceedings in the mere light of human policy, it is impossible to conceive any thing worse directed than this march, nor any situation more dangerous than that in which the children of Israel were now encamped. We ought not, therefore, to wonder at their terror and complaints, when they found that the Egyptian army was drawing near ; for the place was a defile, in the midst of impassable mountains, with the Red Sea in their front. Thus destruction seemed absolutely certain ; since contest was vain, and escape impracticable. Yet it must be considered as strange that Pharaoh should have been anxious to recover this people under his yoke, when he had already suffered so many judgments on their account. The truth is, he appears to have watched their progress by his spies ; and when he found what an unaccountable route they had taken, and the perilous condition in which they were placed, he looked upon them as a prey thrown into his hands. His courtiers also forgetting their former terrors, and the importunity with which they urged Pharaoh to send the people away, began to upbraid themselves for having dismissed such a useful body of

slaves. There was in Egypt a remarkable union between the priestly and military orders, so that the king found no difficulty in raising a very considerable force on this occasion, at the head of which, according to the custom of the antient heathens, were carried the national idols. The Egyptians were full of confidence, on beholding the objects of their pursuit so completely hemmed in as to be incapable of making any further progress; while the Israelites, at the sight of their old oppressors, were thrown into a state of despair, and began to vent bitter reproaches against Moses. "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?"

To all human appearance, certainly there was not the least hope of deliverance; yet they who had witnessed so many and great wonders, might at least have waited in silent submission upon the Lord, who by ten miraculous judgments had displayed his power over Egypt, and brought out his people from thence with a mighty hand. But it is too common even for religious minds to regard impending evil, without that reference to former mercies, which would lessen its magnitude or increase their faith. Moses, though he knew not as yet in what way deliverance would be accomplished, had a firm reliance upon the goodness of Jehovah; and in this spirit he addressed the people: "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show you to-day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."

The manner in which this great salvation was effected, could only have proceeded from the immediate operation of Divine power; since no wind, however violent, was ever known to lay open the

bed of the sea; nor was it possible for such a numerous train, heavily incumbered, to have passed from one shore to the other, within the short space of the ebbing and flowing of the tide. These wretched expedients to account for the fact, in order to get rid of the miracle, betray equal ignorance and infidelity; since, by ascribing the occurrence to ordinary causes, more is given to nature than it was ever known to possess. In truth, the history must either be set aside, or the miraculous transact be allowed to stand exactly as it is recorded.

By this signal display of the Divine majesty, different objects were accomplished: in the first place, so terrible a judgment upon Pharaoh and his host, could not fail to make an impression upon the inhabitants of Egypt; who must in consequence have lost much of their arrogance, if not of their superstition. But the effects produced by this catastrophe on the neighbouring nations, were of the greatest importance; and thus they are stated by Moses in his triumphant song: "The people shall hear and be afraid; sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; trembling shall take hold upon the mighty men of Moab: all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away." Well indeed might they be filled with astonishment on hearing what wonders Jehovah had wrought for his people; while to these again the remembrance of their passage through the depths of the sea, could hardly fail to produce an awful reverence for that Power, under whose guidance they went safely through, and then "saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore." So long as the sense of this tremendous scene was fresh in their minds, "the people feared the Lord, and believed Him, and his servant Moses." That they ever lost this fear, or sunk into a state of unbelief, is still more unaccountable than the obduracy

of Pharaoh, by which he was impelled to enter the gulf prepared for his destruction. But when we consider the insensibility with which the spiritual deliverance here figured, is regarded even by those who call themselves Christians, we may cease to wonder at the ingratitude of Israel. We learn from an inspired expositor, that this passage of the Red Sea was typical of our redemption by Christ. "All the fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto, or by Moses, in the cloud and in the sea." 1 Cor. x. 1, 2. In this overthrow of the Egyptian tyrant, his gods, and his armies, we have a lively representation of the conquest obtained over the powers of darkness, by the death and resurrection of the incarnate Saviour, or the same Jehovah Angel, who in the pillar of cloud and fire conducted his ancient inheritance from Egypt, through the sea and the wilderness, to the promised land.

As Moses lifted up his rod, which divided the waters, and gave the children of Israel a safe passage to the opposite shore, while their pursuers were whelmed beneath the waves; so Christ by his cross has opened the path of light and immortality to all believers, and poured everlasting destruction upon their inveterate enemy. Under this triumphant Leader, therefore, the redeemed church is enabled to sing with joy, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. xv. 55, 57.

FEBRUARY THE TWELFTH.

THE WATERS OF MARAH.

Exodus, xv. 26.—*I am the Lord that healeth thee.*

THAT the children of Israel should be so soon un-mindful of the deliverance which the Lord had wrought out for them, presents a melancholy picture of human infirmity. They had seen the course of nature altered for their security; the mighty waters, contrary to the laws of fluids, divided, and heaped up on either side, to give the people of God free passage through the bosom of the deep; and when they reached their destination in safety, the suspended billows were again let loose, and the presumptuous Pharaoh, with all his host, lay buried in the waves; so that not one of them was left. Thus the Israelites beheld the strait which they had just passed on dry land, covered with water, while the bodies and spoils of their enemies lay strewed on the sea-shore.

The divine hymn which was sung by their illustrious and inspired chief was no doubt reverberated from all the tribes with feeling hearts and joyful tongues. It is said, indeed, that “they believed in the Lord, and his servant Moses;” but so short-lived is gratitude, that in a few days, when the same people were in want of water, and came to that which was bitter, whence the place obtained the name of Marah, they murmured and said, “What shall we drink?” Such is the inconsiderate weakness of man, that his hopes usually go beyond moderation, and his crosses are endured with impatience. In the season of prosperity he thinks only of himself, ascribing the favourable situation in which he stands, to his own skill and management; but no sooner does affliction come, than he begins to complain, and to charge others with being the authors of evils which no foresight

could have prevented, and for which no human contrivance can find a remedy. This is generally the case with the multitude, who regard public success as the result of national virtue; and attribute political misfortunes wholly to those who are in authority. When the Israelites discerned the flowing stream, after a search of three days, they felt great joy, and congratulated each other on the discovery; but the moment they found that the water was unpalatable, their resentment was vented against Moses, as though he was not equally affected by the disappointment with themselves. Forgetting that they owed their lives and liberty, under Divine goodness, to his prudence and zeal, they began to complain of him for not providing wells in the desert exactly suited to their taste and convenience. This shows the arduous condition in which Moses was placed, at the head of an unthankful people, who were so little moved by judgments or mercies, that upon every fresh trial and adversity they were ready to break out into open revolt. In the present exigency, Moses addressed his prayer to Jehovah, who gave him directions to a particular tree, the wood of which being cast into the waters rendered them perfectly sweet and wholesome. The same effect could have been produced by a word, in the name and power of the Almighty; but Moses was shown a tree for the healing of these waters; which taught the Israelites that natural evils and their remedies are placed so near to each other, that by using diligent search, in a right spirit, men may convert their very troubles into blessings, and the bitterest disappointments into sweet enjoyments.

But we are not to suppose that this tree had any inherent quality which purified the waters; the effects were too instantaneous and extensive to have been produced by any thing short of the Divine power, though the wood was made the instrumental sign of imparting healing virtue to the streams of Marah.

But this was a symbol of something more than what appeared to the church in the wilderness; and He who inhabited the cloud, thus ordained the bitterness of the waters, with the means of healing them, as a memorial to future generations; so that when the mystery should be revealed, it might be seen that the economy of redemption was uniform from the beginning to the fulness of time. This miracle was followed by a covenant ratified at these waters: "And Moses said to Israel, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee." The waters of Marah were therefore intended as a trial of the Israelites, or as an exercise of faith, showing the imperfection of all human works and enjoyments, with the necessity of Divine grace to sanctify the one and sweeten the other. That grace was represented in a variety of services under the law, all pointing by different ways to the atonement made for sin by the sufferings and death of the Messiah. The same object was aptly figured in the tree cast into the bitter waters; and therefore, in allusion to the universal efficacy of the sacrifice which should be offered upon the cross, it was said, after this miracle, "I am the Lord that healeth thee;" or rather, as it might be rendered more exactly, "I, JEHOVAH, will be thy healer." Thus the Gospel was preached in signs and promises unto Israel of old; and by this we know that the same Divine Person who conducted them through the wilderness, is the Saviour, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." 1 Cor. i. 30, 31. Even the antient Jewish exposi-

tors could see that the means of purifying the waters of Marah, represented the tree of life ; and upon the Christian church it impresses the comfortable truth, that all suffering for righteousness sake is sweetened by the cross, the consideration of which enables every believer to adopt the language of the Apostle, "I am crucified with Christ ; nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me : and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Gal. ii. 20.

FEBRUARY THE THIRTEENTH.

THE HEAVENLY MANNA.

Exodus, xvi. 35.—*And the children of Israel did eat manna forty years, until they came to a land inhabited ; they did not eat manna until they came unto the borders of the land of Canaan.*

THE history of Israel, considered in the mere letter, will appear frequently involved in difficulties which must prove very perplexing and inexplicable to those who seek for the reasons of things in their immediate operations and effects. It seems strange that this people should have been supported in a miraculous manner, and be led for many years from one station to another in the wilderness, without making any attempt to obtain possession of the promised land. But when we learn that "these things happened unto them for examples ; and were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor. x. 11) ; we are enabled in every part to see something which relates to our own character and circumstances as strangers in the earth, under the guidance of the same heavenly Leader who brought his

people from Egypt; conducted them in the desert, and planted them in the land flowing with milk and honey. The same spirit of discontent which appeared at the bitter fountains, burst forth soon after with increased violence, when the people were in want of provisions. Instead of recalling recent mercies to remembrance, and laying their case before the Lord in supplication, they began to lament their deliverance from Egypt, and to accuse Moses and Aaron of having brought them from thence with the evil design of destroying them by hunger. This grovelling disposition is an evident proof that nothing but the Divine power could have rescued such an unthankful people from slavery, or preserved them as a society in the face of warlike nations, who looked upon them with jealousy and abhorrence. In the present distress Moses and Aaron did not treat the reproaches of Israel with the severity which the provocation might have warranted; but replied in a strain of gentle remonstrance: "What are we? Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord." But the Almighty neither reproofed nor punished them for their unbelief and ingratitude. "I will yet prove them," said he compassionately, "whether they will walk in my law or not." Agreeable to his promise he sent them at even quails, which covered the camp, and in the morning bread from heaven. As this last was to continue in a regular supply, particular directions were given concerning it, and a pot of it ordered to be laid up before the Lord in the tabernacle, for future generations.

The manna was not any natural production of the earth, or a material exudation from plants, but came down from heaven as the dew in the night, and hardened into white grains, like hoar-frost. Its taste was oily, and resembled honey; but the author of the Book of Wisdom says, "Thou feddest thine own people with angel's food, and didst send them from

heaven bread prepared without their labour, able to content every man's delight, and agreeing to every taste. For thy sustenance declared thy sweetness unto thy children, and serving to the appetite of the eater, tempered itself to every man's liking." Wisd. xvi. 20, 21. When the sun arose, this substance melted, yet it might be either baked or boiled, according to the inclination of the people, who were to gather it every morning, except that of the sabbath, at the rate of an omer for each person. If more was collected than the allotted proportion, what remained bred worms, and stank so as to be unfit for use. With respect to the name, it was called by the donor, bread from heaven; the Psalmist calls it the corn of heaven, and the bread of the Mightiest; but the Israelites, at the first discovery of this substance, said to each other in surprise, *Man hu?* What is this? from whence comes the ordinary appellation of Manna. Such was the Divine food daily provided for this people in the wilderness, and of which they did eat forty years, until they came into the borders of the land of Canaan. This was to them a sacrament; and it also represented another food, which in the New Testament is called the spiritual and hidden manna. Rev. ii. 17. Of this typical meaning our Lord gave the Jews a clear explication, when he expounded the benefits derived from the visible manna of the Divine life, which he alone communicates to believers. "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." John, vi. 49. 51. The manna in the wilderness was a sacramental sign that the Lord would fulfil his promise to the chosen seed, by establishing

them in the land promised to their fathers. But though it supported them from day to day, it could neither preserve their bodies from the grave, nor give eternal life to their souls. The hidden manna, or the principle of Divine grace, on the contrary, seals the righteous to the day of resurrection, and assures to them a glorious immortality. In allusion to this sublime mystery of redemption by Christ, the visible manna, in its properties and the regulations concerning it, will be found to contain many important points of instruction. The purity of the visible manna denoted the perfection of the Messiah as a lamb without spot or blemish; who, by the entire obedience of his life, and voluntary submission to death, has wrought out complete and everlasting righteousness for his church. As the manna was wonderfully adapted to the taste of all the people, though consisting of many thousands in different stages of life; so the grace of God in Christ is uniform and universal, being alike sweet and precious to all believers of every age and situation. Here, truly, the "rich and the poor meet together" with equal delight, because the Lord is the Maker and Redeemer of them all. The measure of manna which the people were to receive, was to be in exact proportion to the need of each person, so that he who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack. This also was intended to show that the distribution of the hidden manna would be according to the measure of capacity, and degree of faith, possessed by each believer in the church of Christ; wherein, "though there are diversities of operations, it is the same God who worketh all in all," 1 Cor. xii. 7. The Israelites were to gather every morning sufficient food for the day, and no more; and if any of them disobeyed that order, the superfluous manna, instead of proving a store for time to come, became putrid and offensive. This taught them the important lesson,

that being continually dependant on the Divine bounty, they should be contented with the supply of their present wants, and not be mistrustful of the special Providence, under whose government they enjoyed such extraordinary mercies and privileges. In like manner the Head of the church hath taught his disciples to pray for their daily or supersubstantial bread, by which is meant not merely the supply of all things necessary for the support of animal life, but that grace which will sanctify poverty itself, and convert even crosses and troubles into spiritual sustenance. A double portion of manna was to be gathered on the morning preceding the sabbath, for the supply of that sacred day; which instructed Israel of old, as it should us, that God provides a two-fold portion for those who engage faithfully in his service; and that neither in this world, nor in that which is to come, will he ever leave them or forsake them. Thus the sensible manna was a continual sacrament, which, while it supported the body, afforded also nourishment to the soul, as Moses himself explained it to the people: "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee; to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." Deut. viii. 2, 3. The latter part of this explication was cited by our Lord against the tempter; and the whole may teach his disciples that the same Divine grace can furnish them a table in the wilderness, and feed them with the bread of heaven unto everlasting life.

FEBRUARY THE FOURTEENTH.

WATER FROM THE ROCK.

Exodus, xvii. 5, 6.—*And the Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel: and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.*

THE murmuring Israelites were never satisfied even with miracles; but at every new difficulty they began to reproach Moses as the author of their distress. Though supplied with the bread of heaven, which ought to have humbled them for their former discontent, and taught them where to seek for whatever else they might occasionally want; this refractory people, on coming to Rephidim, were ready to break out into acts of violence, because the place afforded no water. Instead of laying their complaint before the Lord, whose bounty fed them from day to day, they assaulted his chosen servant, saying, "Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt to kill us, and our children, and our cattle, with thirst?" Here again Egypt was remembered only with regret; and they who rejoiced so much at the information that the Lord had visited them in their affliction, were now about to stone his messenger for having brought them out of that land of misery. In this exigency Moses sought the Divine direction, and obtained it, without any censure being passed upon the rebellious spirit which prevailed among the people under his care. But to convince them of their folly and ingratitude, the Lord com-

manded him to take the rod in his hand with which he smote the river in Egypt, and to go before the people attended by their elders. The design of this injunction was to remind them of that Power which deprived their oppressors of water, and consequently to show Israel that He who could turn the river into blood, was able, also, to produce refreshing streams for his chosen in the wilderness. In addition to this memorable instrument with which so many wonders had been accomplished in Egypt, and at the Red Sea, the glory of the Lord went forward in the procession, and stood upon the rock in Horeb. There Moses, in pursuance of the authority with which he was invested, struck the rock, when instantly the waters gushed out and ran in the desert like a river.

This miraculous stream continued its course according to the journeyings of his people, to whom, like their daily manna, it became a sacramental sign of good things to come. As the heavenly food represented the grace of God which believers receive through Jesus Christ, so the fountain opened in Horeb was symbolical of the salvation wrought out by the shedding of his blood upon the cross. The rock was to be smitten before it could send forth the refreshing stream, and in like manner it was expedient that the Messiah should be "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities." Isa. liii. 5. This cleansing and healing virtue of his atonement, is thus described in another prophecy: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." Zech. xiii. 1. Our blessed Lord, by an indirect reference to this type and these predictions, proclaimed aloud in the temple, on the great day of the feast: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water," John, vii. 37, 38.

The evangelical historian applies this declaration to the communication of the Spirit, which was to be made to all believers in Christ, as the consequence of his sufferings in the flesh and ascension to glory.

It may perhaps appear extraordinary that the Divine Author of this gracious invitation should himself exclaim in his last agony, "I thirst." But even this was part of the same work of love towards sinners, in which he voluntarily engaged; "for being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Phil. ii. 8. He was made poor, that we might be rich; he endured the pains of death, to deliver us from condemnation; and he suffered thirst upon the cross, that all who believe in him may be refreshed with the stream of everlasting life. In allusion to the same great object, the Apostle of the Gentiles thus expounds the sacramental mystery imparted to Israel at Horeb: "They did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ." 1 Cor. x. 4. Now if it be asked in what sense it could be said either that the rock or the river, which flowed from its opened side, was the Redeemer? a little attention to the original fact will show that the figure used in this place, is equally just and elegant. Before Moses ventured to strike the rock, the Schechinah, or symbol of the Divine presence, appeared upon its summit, in the sight of all the people; who were thus taught, by the elevation of the wonderful rod, and, above all, by the glory upon the mount, to expect some remarkable display of power in the way of judgment or mercy. When, therefore, they beheld, in the language of the Psalmist, "the hard rock turned into a standing water, and the flint stone into a springing well;" their eyes would of necessity be constrained to look upwards to the manifestation of love, shining gra-

ciously over all ; and from which benevolent source only, their present mercies so bountifully flowed. To every feeling heart Horeb must have sunk into nothing when the glory of the Lord appeared conspicuously upon it ; and to him alone, therefore, would the penitent Israelite ascribe the blessing which ran so copiously at his feet. Christ then may very properly be called the Rock, since in the cloud which sanctified the mount dwelt the same Word, who in the fulness of time became incarnate ; and being smitten for human transgression, “ out of his side flowed blood and water.” By virtue of this sacrifice, repentant sinners obtain pardon and sanctification ; “ being justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Rom. iii. 24. As the rock in Horeb sent forth a quantity of water, not only sufficient for the present supply of the people, but to accompany them in their progress through the wilderness ; so the superabundant grace which believers have in the Redeemer, makes “ their cup to overflow, and goodness and mercy to follow them all the days of their life.” Ps. xxiii. 6. The liberal distribution of water in the desert represented the free communication of the Gospel to all nations, and the offer of mercy to every one who, conscious of his guilt, is desirous of forgiveness and acceptance. It spoke indeed by an expressive figure, this comfortable and animating language : “ The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely.” Rev. xxii. 17.

FEBRUARY THE FIFTEENTH.

DEFEAT OF AMALEK.

Exodus, xvii. 15.—*And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it* JEHOVAH NISSI.

THERE are no foes worse than those of a man's own household; for as they generally commence hostilities upon slight provocations, so they continue to indulge a spirit of resentment long after the occasion which excited it has ceased to exist. Every little circumstance is magnified into an intentional offence; the distress and adversity of the hated object become matter of triumph, while his prosperity only serves to increase the animosity which has been unjustly conceived against him.

When the children of Israel lay encamped near Horeb, or were on their march to that station, the Amalekites, without any cause, came secretly in the rear, and "smote those who were feeble, faint, and weary." Deut. xxi. 18. These people were the lineal descendant of Esau, with whose reconciliation to Jacob it was not likely that they should have been unacquainted; though even if they were, this treachery, in attacking their harmless relations in the wilderness, was so vile and cowardly as to warrant the most severe chastisement. Very different was the injunction given to Israel, respecting the conduct to be pursued towards the families of Esau, in the line of their march. "Meddle not with them; for I will not give you of their land; no, not so much as a foot-breadth, because I have given Mount Scir unto Esau for a possession. Ye shall buy meat of them for money, that ye may eat; and ye shall also buy wells of water of them for money, that ye may drink." Deut. ii. 5, 6. The Amalekites no doubt would have been included in this decree, if they had

not cut themselves off from every claim to respect by this wanton and unprovoked act of cruelty. They were not ignorant of the long captivity and sufferings of their brethren in Egypt, nor of their wonderful deliverance from thence by the arm of the Almighty. The miraculous passage of the Red Sea was known among all the neighbouring nations; and the succeeding signs of Divine power could not well be kept secret from them. This assault, therefore, upon a people under the immediate guidance of Heaven, was not only an act of inhumanity, but of impiety; and as such it is described by the sacred historian, who says, that the Amalekites behaved in this manner, because "they feared not God." Though it is probable that they held the memory of Jacob in abhorrence, on account of his having supplanted their progenitor in the birth-right and the blessing, other prejudices appear to have been mingled with their hatred of his posterity. The Amalekites were enemies to the true religion, and the disgrace poured upon the Egyptian worship, instead of impressing their minds with reverence to Jehovah, and esteem for those who were so highly favoured by him, only served to provoke their malice and incite them to deeds of violence. But with the usual baseness of infidels and persecutors, they attacked those who could make no resistance; and by smiting the hindmost, the assassins thought to effect their own escape.

This flagrant outrage upon every principle of justice, and violation of the honourable usage of arms, obliged Moses to take measures for repelling the insult, and avenging the injury. It is not said, that on this occasion he applied for the Divine commission; and the reason is obvious; since there are certain cases in which natural law itself will dictate the proper course to be pursued for self-defence. When the Israelites came out of Egypt they were purposely led away

from the scenes of war ; but it never was intended that they should be unpractised in military exercises, which were necessary for their security in the wilderness, as well as for the great work designed to be accomplished by them in the land of Canaan. Moses was sensible that the aggression of Amalek called for immediate punishment, as an example, not only to that tribe, but to all the bordering states, many of whom might otherwise be brought to confederate against Israel. With equal promptitude and prudence, therefore, did the man of God direct Joshua to choose his men and go out against Amalek, while he ascended the hill, bearing that wonderful rod in his hand, the sight of which was calculated to animate the little army in their march, and invigorate them in the contest. So long as this ensign was lifted up in the sight of the combatants, Israel prevailed ; but when the hand of Moses became heavy, and the rod dropped, their adversaries had the advantage. Aaron and Hur perceiving the effects of this languor, seated their illustrious relative upon a stone, and then supporting him on each side, so that the rod of God was kept stedfast till the going down of the sun ; victory crowned the efforts of those in the valley, and the faith and prayers of their leaders on the mount. To perpetuate the history of this battle, Moses was commanded to write a memorial of it ; and to leave it upon record, that “ the remembrance of Amalek should be blotted out from under heaven.” This decree was fulfilled in the destruction of Agag, king of Amalek, by Samuel, agreeably to the Divine command ; and the fate of that people was foretold by Balaam, when from the top of Peor he depicted the glory of Israel and the fate of her enemies. “ And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable and said, Though Amalek be the first of nations, his latter end shall be, that he perish for ever.” Num. xxiv. 20. To commemorate this signal

defeat of the treacherous Amalekites, and to encourage the chosen people, Moses erected an altar, either in Horeb, or on the spot where the victory was obtained, and consecrated it by the name of "JEHOVAH NISSI, The Lord is my banner." Such is the history, which is not more remarkable than instructive. Israel in the valley, contending against Amalek, is the church in her militant state, under the true Joshua, "who, in bringing many sons to glory as the captain of their salvation, was made perfect through sufferings." Heb. ii. 10. But as the victory cannot be obtained without faith and prayer; if these droop and fail, the adversary gains an advantage, by pressing his force upon the feeble, faint, and weary. It is therefore necessary for those who engage in this warfare to consider that they are not called to "wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers; against the rulers of the darkness of this world; against spiritual wickedness in high places." Eph. vi. 12. With such formidable enemies it is impossible to contend effectually, unless our hands and hearts are continually raised unto God in holy confidence, and perseverance in prayer.

As the word of God supplies weapons adapted to every trial and temptation to which the Christian may be exposed; so the immutability of the Divine promises will inspire him with new strength in every time of need; "and when the enemy comes in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." Isa. lix. 19. Israel did not obtain the victory till the going down of the sun; neither must the Christian put off his armour till "the night cometh, when no man can work." John, ix. 4. So long as he is in the wilderness he will have many conquests to gain both within and without. His passions must be subdued, and his will brought into entire submission to the banner of his Saviour. This

is the only sure method of resisting the devil, and overcoming the world, which continued to the end, will enable the believer to use the language of the Apostle: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

FEBRUARY THE SIXTEENTH.

THE COUNSEL OF JETHRO.

Exodus, xviii. 24.—*So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father-in-law, and did all that he had said.*

CIVIL government is the ordinance of God, though its modifications must in a great measure be regulated by the character and circumstances of society. There is no other record in existence which gives an account of its origin, but the volume of Divine Revelation, where we read that religion and polity were the united gift of Heaven to man, when he was created out of the earth, and placed in Paradise as a situation of trust and dominion. This is the foundation of social order, which began with the first parents of the human race; and notwithstanding all the changes occasioned by the increase, the corruptions, or even the improvement of mankind, the basis will ever remain the same so long as the moral elements shall have any influence in the world. The Author of nature, who framed all things in number, weight, and measure, did not leave the principal of sublunary beings without law; or abandon him to that wild and savage state in which he should devise rules for

manded him to take the rod in his hand with which he smote the river in Egypt, and to go before the people attended by their elders. The design of this injunction was to remind them of that Power which deprived their oppressors of water, and consequently to show Israel that He who could turn the river into blood, was able, also, to produce refreshing streams for his chosen in the wilderness. In addition to this memorable instrument with which so many wonders had been accomplished in Egypt, and at the Red Sea, the glory of the Lord went forward in the procession, and stood upon the rock in Horeb. There Moses, in pursuance of the authority with which he was invested, struck the rock, when instantly the waters gushed out and ran in the desert like a river.

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THERE are no foes worse than those of a man's own household ; for as they generally commence hostilities upon slight provocations, so they continue to indulge a spirit of resentment long after the occasion which excited it has ceased to exist. Every little circumstance is magnified into an intentional offence ; the distress and adversity of the hated object become matter of triumph, while his prosperity only serves to increase the animosity which has been unjustly conceived against him.

When the children of Israel lay encamped near Horeb, or were on their march to that station, the Amalekites, without any cause, came secretly in the rear, and "smote those who were feeble, faint, and weary." Deut. xxv. 18. These people were the lineal descendants of Esau, with whose reconciliation to Jacob it was not likely that they should have been unacquainted ; though even if they were, this treachery, in attacking their harmless relations in the wilderness, was so vile and cowardly as to warrant the most severe chastisement. Very different was the injunction given to Israel, respecting the conduct to be pursued towards the families of Esau, in the line of their march. "Meddle not with them ; for I will not give you of their land ; no, not so much as a foot-breadth, because I have given Mount Seir unto Esau for a possession. Ye shall buy meat of them for money, that ye may eat ; and ye shall also buy wells of water of them for money, that ye may drink." Deut. ii. 5, 6. The Amalekites no doubt would have been included in this decree, if they had

not cut themselves off from every claim to respect by this wanton and unprovoked act of cruelty. They were not ignorant of the long captivity and sufferings of their brethren in Egypt, nor of their wonderful deliverance from thence by the arm of the Almighty. The miraculous passage of the Red Sea was known among all the neighbouring nations; and the succeeding signs of Divine power could not well be kept secret from them. This assault, therefore, upon a people under the immediate guidance of Heaven, was not only an act of inhumanity, but of impiety; and as such it is described by the sacred historian, who says, that the Amalekites behaved in this manner, because "they feared not God." Though it is probable that they held the memory of Jacob in abhorrence, on account of his having supplanted their progenitor in the birth-right and the blessing, other prejudices appear to have been mingled with their hatred of his posterity. The Amalekites were enemies to the true religion, and the disgrace poured upon the Egyptian worship, instead of impressing their minds with reverence to Jehovah, and esteem for those who were so highly favoured by him, only served to provoke their malice and incite them to deeds of violence. But with the usual baseness of infidels and persecutors, they attacked those who could make no resistance; and by smiting the hindmost, the assassins thought to effect their own escape.

This flagrant outrage upon every principle of justice, and violation of the honourable usage of arms, obliged Moses to take measures for repelling the insult, and avenging the injury. It is not said, that on this occasion he applied for the Divine commission; and the reason is obvious, since there are certain cases in which natural law itself will dictate the proper course to be pursued for self-defence. When the Israelites came out of Egypt they were purposely led away

from the scenes of war ; but it never was intended that they should be unpractised in military exercises, which were necessary for their security in the wilderness, as well as for the great work designed to be accomplished by them in the land of Canaan. Moses was sensible that the aggression of Amalek called for immediate punishment, as an example, not only to that tribe, but to all the bordering states, many of whom might otherwise be brought to confederate against Israel. With equal promptitude and prudence, therefore, did the man of God direct Joshua to choose his men and go out against Amalek, while he ascended the hill, bearing that wonderful rod in his hand, the sight of which was calculated to animate the little army in their march, and invigorate them in the contest. So long as this ensign was lifted up in the sight of the combatants, Israel prevailed ; but when the hand of Moses became heavy, and the rod dropped, their adversaries had the advantage. Aaron and Hur perceiving the effects of this languor, seated their infirm relative upon a stone, and then supporting him on each side, so that the rod of God was kept stedfast till the going down of the sun ; victory crowned the efforts of those in the valley, and the faith and prayers of their leaders on the mount. To perpetuate the history of this battle, Moses was commanded to write a memorial of it ; and to leave it upon record, that “ the remembrance of Amalek shou'd be blotted out from under heaven.” This decree was fulfilled in the destruction of Agag, king of Amalek, by Samuel, agreeably to the Divine command ; and the fate of that people was foretold by Balaam, when from the top of Peor he depicted the glory of Israel and the fate of her enemies. “ And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable and said, Though Amalek be the first of nations, his latter end shall be, that he perish for ever.” Num. xxiv. 20. To commemorate this signal

defeat of the treacherous Amalekites, and to encourage the chosen people, Moses erected an altar, either in Horeb, or on the spot where the victory was obtained, and consecrated it by the name of "JEHOVAH NISSI, The Lord is my banner." Such is the history, which is not more remarkable than instructive. Israel in the valley, contending against Amalek, is the church in her militant state, under the true Joshua, "who, in bringing many sons to glory as the captain of their salvation, was made perfect through sufferings." Heb. ii. 10. But as the victory cannot be obtained without faith and prayer; if these droop and fail, the adversary gains an advantage, by pressing his force upon the feeble, faint, and weary. It is therefore necessary for those who engage in this warfare to consider that they are not called to "wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers; against the rulers of the darkness of this world; against spiritual wickedness in high places." Eph. vi. 12. With such formidable enemies it is impossible to contend effectually, unless our hands and hearts are continually raised unto God in holy confidence, and perseverance in prayer.

As the word of God supplies weapons adapted to every trial and temptation to which the Christian may be exposed; so the immutability of the Divine promises will inspire him with new strength in every time of need; "and when the enemy comes in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." Isa. lix. 19. Israel did not obtain the victory till the going down of the sun; neither must the Christian put off his armour till "the night cometh, when no man can work." John, ix. 4. So long as he is in the wilderness he will have many conquests to gain both within and without. His passions must be subdued, and his will brought into entire submission to the banner of his Saviour. This

is the only sure method of resisting the devil, and overcoming the world, which continued to the end, will enable the believer to use the language of the Apostle: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

FEBRUARY THE SIXTEENTH.

THE COUNSEL OF JETHRO.

Exodus, xviii. 24.—*So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father-in-law, and did all that he had said.*

CIVIL government is the ordinance of God, though its modifications must in a great measure be regulated by the character and circumstances of society. There is no other record in existence which gives an account of its origin, but the volume of Divine Revelation, where we read that religion and polity were the united gift of Heaven to man, when he was created out of the earth, and placed in Paradise as a situation of trust and dominion. This is the foundation of social order, which began with the first parents of the human race; and notwithstanding all the changes occasioned by the increase, the corruptions, or even the improvement of mankind, the basis will ever remain the same so long as the moral elements shall have any influence in the world. The Author of nature, who framed all things in number, weight, and measure, did not leave the principal of sublunary beings without law; or abandon him to that wild and savage state in which he should devise rules for

his conduct. With the impress of the Divine image was communicated to his mind, the knowledge of his condition and the relation in which he stood to the creatures as well as to his Creator ; consequently he was not left ignorant of the duty which he owed to himself and his own species. The notion, therefore, of an original compact, by which, at some remote period, an undescribed set of men established a form of union, law, and government, for their mutual security, is a fiction unsupported by any evidence, and contrary to the very constitution of human nature. Man is the creature of society, born and trained up in obedience to those who have a natural rule over him. He in his turn becomes possessed of power according to his station and rank in the community ; and in the exercise of his paternal authority, he considers himself as acting by virtue of an inherent right granted to him by the Supreme Governor of the universe. What is thus seen, and insisted upon in private life, and in the organization of every household, is equally clear and obligatory with respect to the more extensive concerns of those societies which may truly be called the great families of the earth. Here, as in the inferior case, the forms and orders may vary according to the magnitude and relations of each community ; but the principle which binds the members together, is the same, and “ no man can resist this power without resisting the ordinance of God.” Rom. xiii. 2.

If ever there was a body of men with whom the social contract could have taken place, it must have been the Israelites after their deliverance from the oppression of the Egyptian yoke. They were in every respect a new people ; and when subsisting by themselves in the wilderness, they might, on the ground of the natural right to create a government, have formed a civil and an ecclesiastical polity, suited to their peculiar condition. But so far was this from

being the case, that we find Moses exercising authority over them, even in matters where he does not appear to have had an immediate commission from Heaven. When Jethro came to visit him in Horeb, and saw all that he did to the people in determining causes between them; he said, "What is this thing that thou doest? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even? And Moses said unto his father-in-law, Because the people come unto me to inquire of God. When they have a matter, they come unto me, and I judge between one and another; and I do make them know the statutes of God and his laws." It is observable, that none of the ordinances by which Israel was to be governed, not even those of the moral law, were as yet imparted unto Moses, and, therefore, in his judicial character, he must at this time have been guided wholly by the original rule given to man. Jethro rightly perceived that this burthen was too great for one person to bear, especially the leader of a numerous body of people, upon whom lay the obligation of so many other duties, and whose time, of course, ought to be occupied rather with the general concerns of the state, than the private contentions of individuals. And Jethro said, "The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone. Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: be thou for the people to Godward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: and thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt show them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. Moreover, thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of

thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens; and let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burthen with thee. If thou shalt do this, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace." This counsel of Jethro, which was approved of, and carried into effect by Moses, shows that even the authority of the magistrate did not proceed from the consent of the people, much less government itself.

The legislator of the Hebrews at first administered justice to them in person, without having any other code of laws than what he may be supposed to have received when he was commanded to bring the people out of Egypt. At the recommendation of the prince of Midian, who, according to his own words, had no divine commission for the purpose, Moses afterwards instituted a body of inferior judges, reserving the supreme jurisdiction in his own hands. All this was performed on his part, and submitted to by Israel before that great ceremony took place, mentioned in the next chapter, and which has by some been called the Horeb contract. The history proves that in the earliest days the civil power was regarded, by those who feared God, as a sacred trust derived from him for the public good. It teaches us also the inestimable value of government, and the obedience due to those who are in authority; "that we may under them lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." 1 Tim. ii. 2. When we happily enjoy rulers like those described by Jethro, "able men, fearing God; men of truth, hating covetousness;" we should give thanks for them, pray for their welfare, and supplicate the continuance of so great a blessing. On the other hand, if, for the punishment of national sin, or the trial of our

faith and patience, the wicked should exercise the rule over us, it will be our duty to bear the grievance as a scourge, and to seek, by constitutional means only, for a removal of the evil. No pretence, however, will excuse rebellion in a Christian, since that is not only disobedience to the express law of God, but an infraction of the order of nature ; and is in fact arming a multitude of tyrants against one. Even in extreme cases, that man will find most satisfaction and calm content who takes the Divine law for his rule, and Christ for his example ; “ who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth : who when he was reviled, reviled not again ; when he suffered, he threatened not ; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously.” 1 Pet. ii. 22, 23.

FEBRUARY THE SEVENTEENTH.

GIVING OF THE LAW.

Exodus, xx. 20.—*And Moses said unto the people, Fear not ; for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.*

THOUGH the Israelites were not without laws on their departure from Egypt, as we have already seen in the administration of Moses, and his appointment of magistrates to decide causes between them, “ according to the statutes of God ;” yet as this nation was to be under the particular government of Heaven, uniting the civil and ecclesiastical polity in one theocracy, a special revelation of ordinances became in their case absolutely necessary. The code imparted to this people was so extraordinary, that, without a Divine promulgation, the strictness of the judicial part might have been considered as too

rigorous to be endured; and the institutions of the ceremonial as too numerous and burthensome to be fulfilled. Even the moral law, unsupported by such a solemn sanction, would appear to persons just come out of a country which was covered with gross idolatry and licentiousness, as little better than an exchange of one tyranny for another. They were always ready to murmur and mutiny against Moses, upon every little difficulty and disappointment; if therefore he had brought them a body of laws for their government, he would have found it difficult to persuade such a perverse generation that it came from heaven. It was proper then, on their own account, that the institute should be revealed in such a manner as not to be mistaken by those who were to regulate their conduct by its precepts. What the whole nation, old and young, saw with their own eyes, and heard with their own ears, could not fail to make a deep impression upon their hearts; at least the terror of the scene would be remembered whenever the statutes were read, or repeated to them. But the MORAL LAW only was proclaimed from Sinai by the voice of God; to show that this alone was immutable, and of universal obligation. The JUDICIAL LAW was imparted to Moses, and by him to the elders of the people, because it concerned the particular polity of Israel, and was to stand or fall with that state. The CEREMONIAL LAW, as having respect to another dispensation, which it shadowed in all its parts, was communicated to Moses in a still more private manner, and ended with the tabernacle or temple service, when the vail was rent in twain. The external sanctification of the people, to prepare them for the reception of this revelation, denoted that inward purity which is required by the law of God; and the denunciation of death to those who should touch the mountain, was a lesson to the Israelites that they were unworthy to appear in the Divine presence.

To heighten the grandeur of this tremendous ceremony, peals of thunder and flashes of lightning broke forth from the cloud of thick darkness which enveloped the mountain, from whence arose to the midst of heaven smoke and fire, as out of a furnace; while Sinai trembled to its foundation, and Moses himself said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." Heb. xii. 21. These signs were intended to proclaim the majesty of the Divine Legislator, and to create in those who witnessed the awful spectacle, a reverence for his commands. They also depicted the nature of the law, which, without an atonement and mediator, is the ministry of death and condemnation to those who disobey its injunctions; and they were also designed, as Moses said, "to prove the people," by setting the fear of God before their faces, that they might be kept from the sins of other nations. The law, which was thus revealed to the Israelites from Mount Sinai, consisted of ten words, or commandments, on which account it obtained the Greek name of the Decalogue. It was divided into two great branches, the one comprehending purely religious duties, or those to be paid to the Deity; the second, containing those which men owe to each other. An Apostle has said, that "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. xiii. 10); and it is clear that no obedience can be sincere or perfect, unless it proceeds from this principle. Our blessed Lord, therefore, compressed the two tables into this summary: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Matt. xxii. 37—40. We learn from hence that the moral law is perpetual, and even eternal; for no time or circumstance can release intelligent beings from the

duty of loving God and their fellow-creatures. While we are in the present state, every moment will call for the expression of this sentiment, which must be wholly unrestrained by the fear of man, and unmixed with any selfish considerations. He who gave the precepts from Sinai, and who alone completely fulfilled them in the spirit as well as the letter, hath explained the extent of their obligation, as reaching to the inmost thoughts of the heart; so that even an unlawful desire, or angry wish, will be adjudged a violation of the law.

The perpetuity of the moral law was further signified in the engraving of it by the finger of God upon two tables of stone, which pointed out its superiority over all other institutions, and was designed also to intimate that it came immediately from the Almighty, whose Spirit only can write it effectually upon the human heart. These tables were to be laid up in the ark of the covenant, under the mercy-seat; not only as a standing testimony of their divine origin and authority, but as symbolical of that propitiation which should be made for the remission of sins by the blood of Christ. Though as a rule of life the decalogue binds all to whom it is imparted, as being the Divine will; it contains no provision of mercy for the violation of its precepts. It is surrounded with judgment, and requires an exact conformity to every command, in thought, word, and deed. The language which it proclaims to every man, is the same; "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all." James, ii. 10. In this case then, as "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," it follows of course, that "by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified in his sight." Rom. iii. 20, 23. If it be asked to what purpose was such a system given, which no man could strictly obey, according to the interpretation of the Divine Author, it might be

sufficient to answer, that the revelation was of importance in promoting the civilization of the Israelites themselves, and restraining them from being contaminated by the evil practices of their neighbours. But it had a more exalted object, and was designed to be the ministration of righteousness unto the end of time. The decalogue, and the institutions founded upon it, were intended to make man acquainted with his sinfulness, and consequently with the necessity of a Saviour. Hence the law, as the Apostle hath observed, "is our school-master, to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." Gal. iii. 24. Its precepts and discipline, when properly felt and understood, impel us to seek for a perfect righteousness in which we may find acceptance with God. This was represented in all the ordinances which followed the promulgation of the law, particularly by the shedding of blood, without which there could be no remission of sins. But as the law could not justify the sinner, nor animal sacrifices atone for his offence, the whole must have pointed to some Divine offering which was to be made for human transgression. What this was, we know from Him who declared that he came "not to destroy, but to fulfil the law," in the perfect obedience of his life, and the complete satisfaction for sin, which he made to Divine justice by his death. Now, therefore, though the law is still a rule under this merciful dispensation, it is followed by redemption from the curse and condemnation which all lie under who obey not the whole of its precepts to the utmost tittle; so that "if any man sin, we have now an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." 1 John, ii. 1, 2.

FEBRUARY THE EIGHTEENTH.

GOD IN THE MOUNT.

Exodus, xxiv. 10.—*And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet, as it were a paved work of a sapphire-stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness.*

THE moral law having been proclaimed with august solemnity, by the voice of God himself, in the hearing of the people, the judicial code was communicated to Moses alone, who wrote all the words thereof in a book; after which he received an injunction to come up into the mount, attended by Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, with seventy of the elders or heads of tribes. This command was designed to answer all the ends of a public promulgation of the civil institute already imparted, and the ceremonial which was to follow; since the chiefs of Israel hereby became competent witnesses of the Divine origin and authority of these ordinances, as the people were of the decalogue. Accordingly Moses prepared these persons for the service to which they were called, by burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. "With half of the blood he sprinkled the altar; then taking the book of the covenant, he read in the audience of all the people; and they answered, All that the Lord hath said, we will do, and be obedient." By the people, in this place, must be understood the seventy elders, who, with Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, stood as the representatives of the nation; and in that character they were now summoned to appear before the Lord. Moses having received the public assent to all things contained in the book of statutes, proceeded to consecrate the people with the remainder of the sacrificial blood; to which, as St. Paul says, water was added; and, according to

the same authority, the book itself was sprinkled with the mixture. The language of Moses on this occasion was not less remarkable than the ceremony: "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words." This was called the blood of the covenant, because it was a sign that the persons distinguished by it were covered with the atonement which it represented, and so were become qualified to appear in the Divine presence.

There is a striking resemblance between the form used by Moses, when he sprinkled the chiefs of the people, and the declaration of our Lord at the institution of the sacrificial feast, which is commemorative of his death: "This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you" (Luke, xxii. 20); or, as another Evangelist gives it, "which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Matt. xxvi. 28. But the two accounts agree, since the disciples sat at that time before the Lord, in the character of representatives, as the elders did in the mount. What was said, therefore, to each of these assemblies, did not only concern the persons then present, but the whole commonwealth of Israel, to the termination of its polity; and the Christian church to the end of time.

The propriety of this illustration will be more evident, if we closely attend to the wonderful scene which was exhibited in the mount to the chiefs of the people. Though they were not permitted to go beyond a certain limit, yet even within that holy inclosure their eyes beheld the Divine glory. This is twice stated within the compass of a few words, and in such terms that no language could more forcibly express the dignity of any object presenting itself to mortal observation. These persons saw Jehovah, and beneath his feet was a pavement resembling the sapphire-stone in beauty, and the body of heaven in

its clearness. What follows seems still more extraordinary ; " Upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand : also they saw God, and did eat and drink."

Now the whole of this relation plainly shows that there was at this time a distinct view given to these princes of a Divine person in the human form. But it was not one of the angelical order, for none of these intelligencies ever appeared in such majesty, or accepted religious adoration ; much less could the highest of the celestial hierarchy receive burnt-offerings, or be called by that peculiar name, the God of Israel. Neither was it the Divine essence which became manifested to the sight of the elders ; for in this respect, " no man hath seen God at any time ; but the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared him." John, i. 18. When, therefore, we read that Jehovah made himself visible to the representatives of the people, as their God and King, and that they did eat and drink in his presence, our attention is fixed upon some personal appearance, surrounded with splendour, and resembling the vision with which Isaiah was favoured. " In the year," says he, " that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim : each one had six wings ; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts ; the whole earth is full of his glory." Isa. vi. 1—3. Now as Jehovah, who appeared in the temple, was the God of Israel seen in the mount ; and as it is said of our Lord, that " Isaiah saw his glory and spake of him" (John, xii. 41), the inference is obvious, that He who gave the law on Sinai was the Son of God. But we have other evidence to the same point ; for an

Apostle, who was deeply acquainted with the religion of his fathers, hath declared that the Israelites "grieved Christ in the wilderness" (Heb. iii. 17); and in another place, the same inspired writer is express, that the voice of Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, shook the earth when the mount burned with fire. The elders of Israel then had such a view of the Divinity, as must have corresponded with the person of the glorified Redeemer. They saw the WORD, or LOGOS, in the form of human nature, but exalted on the throne of his glory; and reconciling all things unto himself, both in earth and in heaven. The gracious effects of his incarnation, death, and resurrection, were beautifully figured in the paved work, like a sapphire-stone, and the refulgent splendour with which the whole was surrounded. Thus "Christ is set above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but in that which is to come; all things are put under his feet, and he is the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." Eph. i. 21—23.

These nobles of Israel not only saw the Son of God shining in his mediatorial character, but they did eat and drink in his presence. It was the universal custom of the ancients to feast at their sacrifices; for though the holocausts were always consumed, as being sacred to the Deity, this was not the case with the peace-offerings annexed to them, which being of the eucharistic and federal kind, were partly eaten by the priests and the worshippers. Such was the feast which the elders of Israel were permitted to celebrate before the Lord after offering the sacrifices of atonement, and being purified externally by the blood of the victims.

As all this typified the mystery of reconciliation, "by which we who sometimes were afar off, are

made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. ii. 13); so the manner in which the elders of Israel were received into covenant by the visible ministry of the Son of God, figured exactly the institution of the Lord's Supper. The same Divine Person presided on both occasions; and for a similar purpose. In the mount he ratified statutes and ordinances, of which the heads of the people were witnesses; and when he sat with his disciples he said, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations: and I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Luke, xxii. 28—30.

When one of the twelve disciples, on that memorable night, said, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth thus;" his answer displayed the glory of the Divine nature, breaking through the cloud of humanity, in this energetic and affectionate language: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself; but the Father, that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very work's sake." John, xiv. 8—11. Thus was God seen in the mount, and in the person of Jesus Christ, "in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." Eph. i. 7.

FEBRUARY THE NINETEENTH.

SANCTIFICATION OF THE SABBATH.

Exodus, xxxi. 17.—*It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth; and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.*

THE observance of the Sabbath made so important a branch of religious duty, that the precept enjoining it, was repeated on various occasions; and the body of statutes delivered to Moses closed with a particular explication of this institution. In that account are two remarkable points, the proper consideration of which will afford some edifying instruction. The first is, that the Sabbath, according to its designation in the Mosaic law, was a sign to the children of Israel, that Jehovah was their God and King. They had entered into solemn covenant with him as such, and the seventh day of the week was therefore set apart by him for a symbol that they were his subjects. To this effect the commandment is explained in Ezekiel: "I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and hallow my Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I Jehovah am your God." Ezekiel, xx. 19, 20. It is evident, however, that the Sabbath was considered as sacred before the promulgation of the law, since no manna fell on that day; and some of the people were re-proved for going out to seek it, contrary to the Divine restriction. These persons were charged with violating the commandment of God, though the decalogue was not yet revealed to them. The institution, therefore, was not altogether new, nor were the Israelites ignorant of the reason on which the rule was founded, and the obligation they lay

under to reverence the Sabbath. It was indeed known to the patriarchs, as appears from the division of time into weeks ; which distinction is not pointed out by any circumstance in nature, and consequently must have been settled for some civil or religious purpose. We find also, that when the face of the earth was renewed, Noah waited seven days after the return of the dove before he sent her forth again. This shows that the week was a measure of time in the antediluvian world ; and that it became so by the appointment of Infinite Wisdom, to guide man in his duty, is apparent from the account that " God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it ; because that in it he had rested from all his work." Gen. ii. 3. The Sabbath, therefore, was co-eval with man, to whom this declaration must have been made, since he alone could properly keep holy the seventh day. The words run in the nature of a precept, which could only be binding upon those who possessed the rational faculty, and were immediately concerned to worship God for his goodness in the creation. This was the original Sabbath, which continued to be observed till the slavery of Israel in Egypt ; when it is hardly probable, considering the severity with which they were treated, that their oppressors would suffer them to rest entirely one day in every week. The Egyptians had indeed religious festivals of their own in abundance ; but this superstition would only lead them to prevent the Israelites from paying a regular devotion to the Maker of heaven and earth. We have seen how jealous Pharaoh was in this respect, when required to let the people go, that they might hold a feast to God in the wilderness ; and therefore it cannot well be supposed that he would permit them to observe one day in seven in honour of the Almighty, which would be a reflection upon the national idolatry. After the Exodus this institution was renewed, the day of its

observance fixed, and the whole law concerning it enforced by a penal sanction. Before this time it cannot be positively ascertained which day was observed as the seventh; but so long as that number of days was reckoned, and the last of them kept in commemoration of the Divine rest, it would be an obedience of the injunction. The first Sabbath was a public confession that the creation was the work of God, who having completed the whole, rested on the seventh; which portion of time he therefore ordained should be devoted to his service as a day of thanksgiving.

The Jewish Sabbath contained the profession of the same truth; but with this addition, that the Maker of heaven and earth was Jehovah, who brought his people out of bondage, and gave them a law in Mount Sinai. As a sign of this article, that Jehovah the Creator was the God of Israel, one day was ordered to be observed by his people "throughout their generations;" which implied that as this particular day now first became a sign, it should cease to be so on the termination of the Jewish state. In the recapitulation of the law by Moses, instead of giving that reason for the appointment of the Sabbath, which was drawn from the creation, he founds it upon the redemption of Israel. "Remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence, through a mighty hand, and by a stretched-out arm; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath-day." Deut. v. 15. This will explain that part of the Mosaic law which enjoins so strictly an absolute cessation from all kinds of labour. It was to remind the people of their oppressions in Egypt; make them thankful to God for their deliverance, and compassionate to servants, strangers, and even their cattle. This declaration throws light also upon the selection of that particular day which the Israelites

were to observe as their Sabbath. It was adopted as a commemorative sign of their safe passage through the sea, and the destruction of their enemies; "therefore the Lord God commanded them to keep that as their Sabbath-day." Such was the reason which the Hebrew legislator himself gave the people for the appointment of that day to be kept by them in their generations. Now as this shows that it was not the same day which was distinguished in the patriarchal times, so it limits the duration of the Jewish Sabbath to the generations of the theocracy. This brings us to a consideration of what belongs to another dispensation: the occasion of the change, and the obligation we are under to observe the Lord's day as our Sabbath.

The same authority which appointed a determinate day as the Jewish Sabbath, with rules for the observation of it, could alter the one and abrogate the other at his pleasure. Though the institution itself was to be perpetual; so far as regards the use of six days for labour, and the seventh for rest; yet the order of them does not appear to have been settled till the giving of the law; for which, as we have seen, an especial reason was assigned, different from that on which the primary injunction was founded. Both indeed were included in the commandment to keep holy the seventh day; but as one concerned the Jewish nation only, it must of course end with the polity to which it was annexed. And this was the case when the "Lord of the Sabbath" appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. During his ministry, he wrought many miracles on the Sabbath, and vindicated his disciples for plucking the ears of corn on that day. Now all this was intended as a prelude to another change, of which his reply to the Pharisees was a plain indication: "The Sabbath was made for man, and

not man for the Sabbath; therefore the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath." Mark, ii. 27, 28.

Now if Christ be Lord of the Sabbath, he must have established it at first; and if the institution was made for him, or in reference to his manifestation, then an end would be put as well to that as to the other shadows of the law, on the ascension of the Sun of Righteousness.

The Redeemer rested in the grave, or the state of the dead, during the Jewish Sabbath, and on the following morning he arose from thence, as "the first-fruits of them that slept." 1 Cor. xv. 20. Justly, therefore, is this our Sabbath, since it gave us an inheritance with the saints in light; and opened a passage to an eternal rest, which remaineth for the people of God. Heb. iv. 9. In keeping this day, we observe the primary law for sanctifying one day after the labour of six; but instead of commemorating a temporal deliverance, we are called to rejoice, and "give thanks unto God the Father, who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son; in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." Col. i. 13.

FEBRUARY THE TWENTIETH.

THE GOLDEN CALF.

Exodus, xxxii. 30.—*And Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin; and now I will go up unto the Lord, peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin.*

It seems very extraordinary that the children of Israel, who had experienced such great mercies, and witnessed the most fearful judgments, should sink

into idolatry on no other plea than the absence of Moses. At former times their murmuring spirit burst forth on account of the dangers which surrounded them, and the difficulties arising from the want of supplies necessary for their sustenance. But on the present occasion they had no cause for complaint, having been delivered from their enemies by the Divine interposition; and obtaining from day to day bread without labour; and water, which continually reminded them of its miraculous origin. They were distinguished from all nations by the nature of their constitution being under the immediate government of God. They were witnesses of his power, and the monuments of his grace; yet by a strange want of sensibility and gratitude, when they found that Moses remained long in the mount, they gathered around Aaron with the preposterous demand that he should make them gods to go before them. Thus the difference of situation, instead of correcting a perverse disposition, only gives it another turn to evil. The Israelites at every appearance of distress were ready to mutiny against Moses for bringing them out of Egypt; but now when they sat at their ease, and wanted nothing, their restless temper made them eager to remove without permission. This was an open act of rebellion, and it became more atrocious by the deliberate hostility of the people to the Sovereign Authority, whose laws were fresh in their remembrance. The commandment was express, that no image should be made, or the likeness of any thing formed, to serve the purposes of religious adoration. The terms of the prohibition were not more explicit than the intent was obvious, having undoubtedly a reference to the abominations of Egypt, with which the Israelites were well acquainted. Every appearance in the material heaven was there made an object of worship; and even the terrestrial and aquatic creatures, being supposed to

possess some divine properties, became symbols of the Deity. The extreme folly of this superstition had been completely demonstrated in the signs and judgments displayed over the elements, and those parts of nature which constituted the great points of the Egyptian idolatry. These manifestations of supreme power were seen by Israel, whose deliverance and instruction formed their principal design; but so little effect did they produce upon this refractory people, that with the glory of the Lord shining before them, and the words of his law yet sounding in their ears, they demanded gods or images for their protection. They who wonder at this infidelity, would do well to consider how little they have improved the mercies with which God has favoured them; and especially to reflect upon the unthankful returns they have made for his great redemption. In adversity we are too prone to complain of the distribution of worldly good; while in prosperity we make idols of our own inventions. • Thus may we find Israel in our own hearts, impatient under the yoke of restraint which is intended for our good, ungrateful for the blessings with which we are surrounded, and ready to follow every delusion which flatters vanity and administers to sensual delight. That Aaron should so speedily have forgotten the appearance in the mount, as to become an instrument in this act of folly and impiety, is more surprising than the defection of the people. He had seen the God of Israel, and knew that no idea of man could attain to a representation, even of that glory in which Jehovah condescended to reveal himself to the representatives of the people. Aaron was also well acquainted with the positive precept which inhibited every such figure; and yet, through a criminal fear of man, he collected a profusion of golden ornaments, which he cast into the figure of the Egyptian Apis, and finished

it with a graving-tool. There have not been wanting learned men to attempt the apology of Aaron for this strange action; but the answer is contained in the words of Moses, when he repeated the history a little before his death. "And the Lord was very angry with Aaron, to have destroyed him; and I prayed for Aaron also at the same time." Deut. ix. 20.

It cannot, however, be supposed that either the person who fashioned this image, or those for whom it was made, regarded it in any other light than as a splendid figure of the Deity. Aaron, by proclaiming a feast unto Jehovah, after setting up the image, plainly told the people that it was only the emblem of that Power which brought them out of Egypt. But this did not lessen the guilt of the deed, which, besides being a direct violation of an express law, and a shocking insult to the Divine Majesty, was an introduction to the most licentious practices. At the rising of the sun the people offered sacrifices, and having feasted to excess they rose up to play, in the manner of the antient idolaters, whose festive rites consisted of minstrelsy and dancing, which inflamed the passions till all decorum was abandoned, and no sense of shame left in their minds. Such was the spectacle which struck the eyes of Moses, when he descended from the mount; and though already acquainted with the apostacy, he dashed the tables of testimony in pieces at the sight. Then without any assistance from man, he crazed the altar; and reducing the idol to powder, mingled it most probably with the ashes of the sacrifices in water, which he obliged the people to drink. Thus the stream which flowed from Horeb, as a perpetual sign of the power and goodness of Jehovah, became the instrument of their punishment, who had abused all his mercies.

In what manner this was done, is beside our present purpose to consider; nor would the inquiry be

productive of instruction where the history is silent. The narrative shows the pernicious tendency of wrong principles in a nation, and the extreme danger attending the fear of man in those who are in authority. It exhibits also a striking instance of the force of truth in opposition to error, and the superior power of righteousness over guilt. Here was only one Moses to contend with numbers, who were deeply engaged in rebellion; yet we do not hear a single voice exclaiming against the minister of God, nor see an arm lifted up to save the idol from his holy indignation. How little does Aaron appear in this scene when contrasted with his intrepid brother!

The only excuse Aaron could make, was, that the people were bent upon mischief; which Moses so little regarded, that, without returning any answer, he ordered a summary vengeance to be inflicted upon the ringleaders, of whom three thousand fell as an example to the rest. "On the following day Moses convened a congregation of the people, and said, "Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord, peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin." The account which he gives of what occurred in the mount at this time, is no less remarkable than the former part of the history: "I fell down before the Lord forty days and forty nights: I did neither eat bread nor drink water, because of all your sins which ye sinned in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger." Deut. ix. 18. Thus Moses stood between fallen Israel and their offended God, bearing that guilt of which he was not a partaker; and offering his life as a sacrifice for them. "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt, forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." This display of heroic love is without any parallel in the history of nations; but as

Moses was typical of the Messiah, so in this instance, his conduct figured what was really accomplished for our redemption in the death of Christ, "who once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." 1 Pet. iii. 18.

FEBRUARY THE TWENTY-FIRST.

THE PRAYER OF MOSES.

Exodus, xxxiii. 18.—*And he said, I beseech thee show me thy glory.*

TO none of his messengers did God ever vouchsafe so many manifestations of his presence, as the illustrious leader of Israel. At the giving of the law, when the people were kept from approaching the holy mountain under pain of death, he entered the cloud, and was there forty days and forty nights. On the removal of the tabernacle out of the camp, the Shechinah stood in the front of it; and "the Lord spoke from thence to Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." With the promise that the Divine presence would still accompany his inheritance, notwithstanding their heinous provocations, Moses received this particular declaration of favour; "Thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name;" which high mark of distinction denoted that Jehovah had chosen him above all men. In this respect he typified the great Head of the church, "who hath a name given him which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Philip. ii. 9, 10, 11.

Yet the various and peculiar testimonies of love which were given to Moses, only served to enlarge the

desire of his heart to see more of the Divine perfections. "And he said, I beseech thee show me thy glory." This blessed servant of God well knew that the Divine essence could neither be discerned by mortal eye, nor be comprehended by the most exalted understanding. The very angels worship with their faces veiled, and the highest in the order of celestial intelligencies stands far remote from Infinite Purity. Even they know but in part, and their happiness lies in performing the will of God, and in deriving from his fullness continual accessions of wisdom with a more extended sphere of utility. Employed in ministering to the heirs of salvation, it constitutes one of the principal felicities of those glorious spirits to "look into the mystery of redemption," which proves that this stupendous work of grace, in design, performance, and extent, far exceeds even the reach of angelical intellect, and, therefore, calls for the incessant gratitude and contemplation of man. In this sublime science we have a more immediate interest than angels, and every advantage which we make in it will only excite our desire to obtain a deeper acquaintance with its inestimable beauty, and to see more of the Divine love shining in the person of the Mediator. Such was the spirit which animated the soul of Moses, and urged him to make the request that "Jehovah would show him his glory." This was not speculative curiosity, but a holy affection, arising from the lively experience of Divine goodness, and an ardent wish to become more devoted to God. Moses had seen the splendour which indicated the Divine presence, and the symbolical appearance in the mount at the ratification of the covenant; but he wanted to have his mind impressed with such a spiritual influence as should render him equal to his calling, and raise him above the world. There was, however, still more in all this; for the manner in which the petition was

received and answered, proves that Moses intreated the manifestation of some visible form.

Some of the Jewish commentators say, that in this prayer Moses desired to have such an idea of the Divine essence engraved upon his heart, that he might be always free from error. But the exposition is more refined than accurate, for the petition undoubtedly sought an external sign in a distinct view of the immediate glory of Jehovah: this is evident from the answer, "Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see my face and live." But though Moses was denied the sight of the inherent majesty of God, he was permitted to see the display of his mercy in the redemption of man. "And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." Conformably to this promise, which is an explanation of what follows, Moses had a 'symbolical vision of that mystery which is to the very angels an object of delightful contemplation. All the goodness of Jehovah in this great work of salvation was made to appear in the exact order of its accomplishment, and the very NAME of the Saviour revealed by God himself to his chosen minister. Now this was not the name Jehovah, for that was already familiar to Moses; nor could it be the enumeration of attributes which followed it, for these are expressions denoting the character of the person whose name was previously proclaimed. As a higher degree of knowledge was here graciously promised to Moses, the name thus interposed between the going forth of the Divine goodness, and the completion of its operations, must have been some peculiar appellative with which he was not before acquainted. At the same time that he saw the whole scheme of redemption, here called the goodness of God and the dispensation of mercy,

he heard proclaimed the name of Him who should save his people from their sins.

Thus the Redeemer became known to the giver of the law in the various parts of his mediatorial character; and though Moses could not behold the Divine essence, he was enabled to see the glory of God as it shone through the incarnation of the eternal Word. He was also favoured with a sight of that mercy which lay concealed under the legal services; and was more distinctly opened in the prophecies, till its full manifestation in the humiliation and exaltation of the Son of God. These were what our translation renders the back parts of the Divine Majesty, which Moses beheld from the cleft of the rock, another symbolical phrase for the security which the church has in the righteousness of the Saviour. The counsels of the Most High were hidden from his servant, but he could trace the footsteps of his love, and the glory of his apparel: he saw him "travelling in the greatness of his strength; mighty to save." Isa. lxiii. 1. The prayer of Moses should be that of every Christian, whose constant desire ought to correspond with that of the Apostle, "to press forward unto perfection." He is encouraged to this by the gracious invitation of Jehovah, "Seek ye my face;" to which the response of his heart must ever be, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Ps. xxvii. 8.

FEBRUARY THE TWENTY-SECOND.

THE GLORY OF MOSES.

Exodus, xxxiv. 29.—*Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him.*

THOSE persons who stand highest in the Divine favour are the lowest in their own estimation; and

while they shine as lights in the world, their minds are conscious of too many imperfections to be proud of, that excellence which gives them the superiority over others. Exalted as they are in holiness, that which crowns all their virtues is humility; and this distinguishes them from those who have a name to live, and are dead. When, by the gracious condescension of Jehovah, the tables of the law were renewed and delivered to Moses, such an effulgence of glory beamed upon his countenance that the people were afraid to approach him. Even Aaron and the elders were astonished at the sight, and could hold no conversation with their chief till he had cast a veil over his face. Yet Moses himself was at first insensible of the change which had been wrought, and "wist not that the skin of his face shone while Jehovah talked with him." That no such splendour should have distinguished him in the other interviews with which he was favoured, in the mount of God, seems extraordinary, and deserves attention. It could not be that Moses had any nearer intercourse with the Divine Majesty than he had before; but he now stood in a mediatorial capacity on the behalf of the people, in consequence of their gross apostasy. The shining brightness of his countenance denoted the glory of the law of which he was the immediate minister. It was too dazzling and terrible for minds conscious of their guilt, and therefore Moses was obliged to cover himself with a veil, while he communicated the Divine instructions to Aaron and the elders. The veil which intercepted those brilliant rays, and enabled the people to approach their guide, and to hear the words of the Lord from his mouth, signified not only the obscurity of the law, but the necessity of a Mediator to temper its glory and remove its terror. Though Moses appeared with a veil to the people, he laid it aside when he entered the tabernacle; for the mind, under Divine influence,

is strengthened by the communications which it receives; but in imparting that knowledge to others, regard must be had to their infirmities. What Moses himself saw and understood, the people could neither comprehend nor endure. The vail, therefore, which covered his face, figured the shadow of his ordinances; and his going in without it before the Divine presence, was an indication that the whole of that typical system should be abolished by the ministration of the Spirit and of Righteousness. Such is the apostolical explication of this remarkable circumstance which accompanied the ministration of the law, by the mediation of Moses. According to the same inspired authority, the veil farther represented the blindness of Israel under the Mosaic dispensation. "Untill this day," saith he, "remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament; which vail is done away in Christ." 2 Cor. iii. 14. But though the vail denoted the natural blindness of man, and the obscurity of the law, which are one and the same thing; yet as worn by Moses in the revelation of the Divine statutes, it was a very beautiful symbol of that mercy, also, which tempers judgment, and that peace which bringeth in everlasting righteousness. The vail of the ceremonial law was rent in twain when that institution was abolished: but still those divine statutes, which are immutable and of perpetual force, remain as a dead letter, "engraved as it were upon stone, and under a vail, till the Spirit of the living God writes them in the fleshly tables of the heart." When Christ removes this vail, and makes the glory of the law shine upon the mind, then man sees himself in it, and all his infirmities are reflected from it as in a mirror. But his eyes being opened, and his heart renewed by Divine grace, he can contemplate that with steadfastness which "in the letter killeth, but in the spirit giveth life." All his own weakness is more,

than supplied by the sufficiency of the Redeemer ; and when he laments his manifold errors and defects, his numerous violations of the law, and utter incapacity to discharge all its demands, he has "a trust through Christ towards God." The Christian, however, loves the law, as it is the image of the Divine perfections, and especially because it has been exactly fulfilled on his behalf by "Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Rom. x. 4.

As Moses went into the tabernacle without a vail, and could endure in all its glory that which, even by reflection only, struck terror into the beholders ; "so where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." This is not such a liberty as releases from the obligation of the law, but an enlarged and willing mind to observe all its precepts. "If a man," says our Lord, "love me, he will keep my words ; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." John, xiv. 23. They who walk by this rule are truly taught of God, because the Holy Spirit, according to the promise, "guideth them into all truth." John, xvi. 13. Thus the sacred Three co-operate not only in the salvation of the church, but in keeping all her faithful members while they are in the wilderness, and bringing them at last to the purchased inheritance. If, like Moses, these persons are transformed into the Divine likeness by the renewal of their minds, and the influx of grace from the Fountain of light and perfection, the radiance makes them more conspicuous to others than to themselves. Every new advance in virtue and knowledge serves to convince them how much remains to be corrected in their tempers, and what vast regions of learning are still unexplored. Instead of resting satisfied with the progress they have made, it is matter of sorrow to them, that so much time has been lost, and so many

opportunities neglected which might have rendered them more useful in their generations. Hence every Christian, however high may be his attainments, will take up the language of the Apostle, and make it his own: "I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Philip. iii. 13, 14. During the progress of his disciples in the wilderness, the declaration of their dying Lord fills them with comfort: "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am: that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me." John, xvii. 24. Of that glory Moses had an imperfect view on Mount Horeb, when it passed before him in obscure vision; but he saw it in splendour at the transfiguration, when the face of Jesus did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." Matt. xvii. 2. Yet even then this majesty of the Son of God could only be distinctly beheld by beatified spirits, for the disciples in the flesh were overpowered with the effulgence. Still somewhat of his Divine excellence is made to appear in religious ordinances, particularly in meditation and prayer, the word and the sacraments; by a regular attention to which, "we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Cor. iii. 18.

FEBRUARY THE TWENTY-THIRD.

THE TABERNACLE.

Exodus, xl. 34.—*And the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.*

AFTER the promulgation of the law, which was to be of universal obligation, and the establishment of such particular statutes as were necessary to the policy and circumstances of his people, Moses received the Divine command to construct a tabernacle. The directions for this religious work were prefaced by an observable declaration: "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering; of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart, ye shall take my offering." As the structure was to be of equal concern and interest to the whole congregation, therefore in the formation of it all the people were required to unite according to their abilities and disposition. The Almighty dwelleth not in temples made with hands, for the whole extent of space cannot comprehend his infinite essence; neither can he stand in need of our offerings or sacrifices, since the whole world is at his disposal. But as he sanctified a certain portion of time at the beginning, and set it apart from ordinary purposes, for his own honour and the benefit of man; so he considers those places as peculiarly his own which are devoted to his service. In his sight, indeed, one day devoutly spent is more agreeable than a multitude of unprofitable sabbaths; and the prayers and praises offered up from a cottage will be accepted of him, when the formal services of the most magnificent temples are rejected. Yet he expects that both time and place should be appropriated for the reverence due unto his name, and they who put a slight upon either will be found

deficient in that allegiance which they owe to the Maker of heaven and earth. The relative holiness of times and places is indeed of much more extensive importance than many persons seem willing to allow, who are yet not altogether indifferent to the obligation of moral and religious duty. Without such a distinction, in fact, men would soon grow insensible of that privilege which raises them above the irrational part of the creation; and the force of human law would be found of little avail in restraining them from wrong and violence. Even serious minds, for want of certain fixed periods to serve God in a public manner, and stated assemblies in which that worship may be conducted, would become languid in spirit, irregular in their devotional exercises, and distracted by the cares of the world. In the case of the Israelites during their sojourning in the wilderness, some holy edifice was especially needful to preserve in them a constant regard for the sacred laws by which they were governed; and also to keep them from being contaminated by those idolatrous practices which prevailed every where around them. But when the Divine intention was made known to the people, it was stated that the whole work must be a freewill offering on their part. At the same time all the congregation were put upon an equal footing, nothing being exacted from one more than another; but what every person brought was to be a votive gift. The Lord, who loveth a cheerful giver, and who noticed the poor widow when she cast her two mites into the treasury, above all those who contributed out of their abundance, would have his tabernacle, both with respect to the materials and the labour, constructed entirely in the spirit of love. The value of the gifts conferred no distinction upon the donors; for though some brought precious stones and gold, with blue and purple, scarlet and fine linen, while others presented silver and brass, skins and wood; yet all were

considered alike by Him in whose sight "the offering of the willing mind is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." 2 Cor. viii. 12. The only persons recorded upon this occasion were Bezaleel and Aholiab, the directors of the work; and though their natural ingenuity might be very great, it is observed that "the Spirit of God gave them wisdom, understanding, and knowledge." The liberality of the people, and the industry of the artificers, were only a due return for bounty amply bestowed upon them by "the Father of lights, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift." James, i. 17.

By this lesson we are taught not only to consecrate our substance to the glory of God, but our talents also, to his honour in the edification of the church. In this great work all may concur and be useful, from the highest to the lowest; for though the poor and unlettered are not capable of rendering any splendid service, they can do much by their diligence and example, their obedience and piety. So liberal were the children of Israel in their offerings, that it was found necessary to restrain them by proclamation from bringing any more gifts for the public sanctuary. Though zeal is laudable, it must be bounded within the limits of prudence. Even the service of God is to be regulated with due regard to our particular circumstances; and, therefore, He who could justly claim all our time, and the whole of our substance, is contented with a portion of each as an acknowledgement that we depend continually upon him for life, health, and all things we enjoy. The tabernacle was to be built exactly according to the pattern shown to Moses in the mount; and even the materials of this structure, together with the furniture, were prescribed by the same Divine rule. This teaches us that in religious concerns we must submit our reason entirely to the will and word of

God. As the plan of the tabernacle came from heaven, so it is through Divine revelation only, that we obtain the knowledge of God, and of the means of salvation; in all things, therefore, which relate to Christian faith and practice, instead of taking human wisdom for our guide, we must refer to the law and the testimony. The tabernacle was a portable building, consisting of many parts, which were easily taken down, and as readily put together, according to the journeyings of the people. In this respect it was an apt figure of the church, which has no fixed settlement upon earth; but being made up of numerous members, in different ages and countries, will never be stationary or collected till the whole shall be consummated in glory. The tabernacle had many utensils, and in it were celebrated various ceremonies, the intent of which the people could not comprehend, because "these were the shadows of good things to come." Heb. x. 1. But an excellent purpose was answered by the Levitical service, since it pointed out, by expressive symbols, the holiness of God and his immutable justice, the heinousness of sin and the necessity of an atonement. The whole was also calculated to keep the Israelites separate from other nations, and to preserve in their minds an habitual reverence for the sanctuary. When the work was completed, and all things were placed in their appointed order, the "cloud covered the tent, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle; so that Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation." The servant of God, no doubt, rejoiced in spirit on this great occasion, yet the fullness of that glory, though it was the effulgence of mercy, overpowered even his faculties who had so often witnessed the majesty of Jehovah. All the former manifestations of his power and goodness were not equal to this display of his grace; and thus the Psalmist speaks of it: "The Lord said, I will

bring my people from the depths of the sea : they have seen thy goings, O God ; even the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary." Ps. lxxviii. 22, 24. They who worship God in spirit and in truth, feel an awful sense of his glory in the house of prayer, at the same time that their minds are filled with joy in beholding him as their Redeemer and Intercessor. He was set forth to Israel in all the characteristics of his mediatorial office, being represented in the structure, the furniture, and the services of the tabernacle. As this building was called the habitation of the Almighty, so in the human nature of Christ "dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Col. ii. 9. In the holy place was the golden table, with the bread of the Presence, which signified the Messiah, who "is the bread of life." John, vi. 48. The altar of incense was also a lively representation of the Saviour who intercedes for his people, and, by virtue of his perfect sacrifice, has entered into the Holy of Holies ; thereby procuring for them admission to the paradise of God. This mystery of grace was farther denoted in the ark of the covenant, containing the tables of the law, which the Redeemer fulfilled for all who believe in him ; and the cherubim covering the mercy-seat with their wings shadowed the same gracious truth "that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." 2 Cor. v. 19. Thus "the tabernacle was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience ; but Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building ; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood hath he entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." Heb. ix. 9—12.

FEBRUARY THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

NADAB AND ABIHU.

Leviticus, x. 2.—*And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them: and they died before the Lord.*

It is not merely sufficient to worship God, but our services must be performed as he hath appointed, and in the way which his word declares to be most acceptable in his sight. Where men are left without any such direction, they must be guided by the best judgment which their feeble powers can form, and much certainly will be allowed to errors arising from their particular case and condition. But when the commandment is explicit, and the duty fully known, to set up any other rule than that which God hath settled, or to make any alterations in the order which is prescribed in his revelation, can be considered as nothing short of rebellion against the Most High. What he hath left indifferent must be regulated according to the analogy of faith, and those principles which are best adapted for edification; but when the decision is express, and the injunction peremptory, nothing remains to believers but willing obedience, and an attentive regard to the whole law of God. The fate of Aaron's sons affords an awful instance of the sin and danger attending innovations in sacred things. These persons, by taking common fire in their censers, instead of that which God himself had kindled upon his own altar, were guilty of a presumptuous and deliberate act of impiety, for it is said that they did this in violation of an express commandment. Each of them did this with his censor, which shows that the act proceeded not from inadvertency, but design and consultation for an evil purpose. At any time such a contempt of the sacred

order, which God had appointed for his sanctuary, would have been a very heinous transgression; but the offence was increased at this early period, when the religious principles of the people depended so much on the conduct of those who were consecrated to the priestly office. Nadab and Abihu were persons of no ordinary rank, being the eldest sons of the high priest, and having been themselves admitted to the great distinction of appearing before God at the ratification of the covenant. Their sin, then, was aggravated by the privileges which had been conferred upon them, and the elevated station in which they stood among the people. The preservation of the holy fire upon the altar was part of their duty, and it was intended to answer an important purpose, by reminding the Israelites of the miraculous manner in which the first victims offered thereon were consumed. When, therefore, these priests ventured to make so bold an experiment in the Divine service, as to introduce elementary fire when Jehovah had sent that which was celestial for the honour of his name, it was but just that they should receive instant punishment from him, according to the nature of their offence. This judgment was equally necessary for the glory of the Divine Majesty, and in the way of example to the priests and the people. The offenders were, therefore, struck dead by fire before the altar, but in such a manner that none of their sacerdotal vestments were injured by the flame. Upon this part of the history, an excellent writer makes the following reflections: "While the people, with fear and joy, see God lighting his own fire, fire from heaven, the two sons of Aaron, in a careless presumption, will be serving him with a common flame; as if he might not have leave to choose the forms of his own worship. If this had been done some ages after, when the memory of the original of this heavenly fire had been worn out, it might

have been excused with ignorance; but now when God had newly sent his fire from above, newly commanded the continuance of it, either to let it go out, or, while it still flamed, to fetch profane coals to God's altar, could savour of no less than presumption and sacrilege. * When we bring zeal without knowledge, misconceits of faith, carnal affections, the devices of our will-worship, superstitious devotions into God's service, we bring common fire to his altar; these flames were never of his kindling; he hates both altar, fire, priest, and sacrifice. And now behold the same fire which consumed the sacrifice before, consumes the sacrificers. It was the sign of his acceptance, in consuming the beast; but, while it destroyed men, the fearful sign of his displeasure. By the same means can God show both love and hatred. We would have pleaded for Nadab and Abihu; they are but young men, the sons of Aaron; not yet warm in their function; let both age and blood, and inexperience excuse them as yet. No pretences, no privileges can bear off a sin with God. Men think either to patronize or mitigate evils, by their feigned reasons. That no man may hope the plea, either of birth, or of youth, or of the first commission of evil, may challenge pardon, I see here young men, sons of the ruler of Israel, for the first offence struck dead*." This melancholy breach in the family of Aaron could not fail to make a deep impression upon his mind; yet he was expressly forbidden to mourn the loss, or to assist at the interment of his sons. Hard as these prohibitions may appear, they were equally necessary with the judgment which gave occasion for them. Any public expressions of grief on the part of the high priest, would have been little short of a reflection on the justice of God; and essentially injurious to his

* Bishop Hall's Contemplations, book iv. cont. 2.

government of an unsettled people, who were disposed to revolt on the slightest pretences. Dreadful as this catastrophe was, it became indispensable in that state, as a national example; and on this account the whole congregation of Israel, with the exception of Aaron and his remaining sons, were enjoined to "bewail the burning which the Lord had kindled." They were to be grieved for the sin which caused the calamity, but not to lament the fate of the offenders.

From the particular command which was immediately afterwards given to Aaron and his sons, to avoid wine and strong liquors when they were about to enter the tabernacle, "lest they also should die," it has been conjectured that the crime of Nadab and Abihu proceeded from drunkenness. Whether this opinion be well-founded or not, though it has both antiquity and probability for its support; the strictness of the precept is justified by the importance of the ministerial character in society, and the consequent evil attending the immoral conduct of those who are admitted to the exercise of that high calling. Indulgence in what is innocent, will sometimes increase to a habit, that imperceptibly degenerates into intemperance; it will, therefore, be prudent to guard against the approach to sensuality, by restraining the appetite and passions from that which may by frequent use sink the mind into a state of slothful ease, or vicious excess. In the judgement inflicted upon Aaron's sons we see that neither erroneous principles nor practices, in religion, are light matters. Every thing which concerns the Divine glory and the salvation of souls, is of primary importance, and must be referred wholly to the will of God. He expects to be served with the fire which comes from heaven, and to be obeyed in the rule laid down in his own most holy word. They who invert his order are guilty of sacrilegious presumption, for which no plea of superior edification, or the liberty of human-

judgement, will be accepted as an excuse. "They who honour me," says the Lord, "I will honour; and they who despise me shall be lightly esteemed." 1 Sam. ii. 30.

FEBRUARY THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

DISTINCTION OF ANIMALS.

Leviticus, xi. 46, 47.—This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moveth in the waters, and of every creature that creepeth upon the earth; to make a difference between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten.

THE Mosaic institutes contain some things, which to the superficial 'observer may appear to be of trifling import, and unworthy of Divine legislation; but when considered with attention, and examined according to the spirit, rather than the letter, they will be found full of instruction, and the evident result of infinite wisdom and benevolence. Of this kind must be considered the division of the animal creation into two classes, called the clean and unclean.

When the several tribes of fishes, birds, beasts, and creeping things came into being, they received the Divine benediction as good in their respective kinds; and on the completion of the whole, God pronounced his work to be very good. There is, therefore, no such distinction in nature as clean and unclean animals, since they are equally the production of his goodness, who has adapted the structure and qualities of all to their respective habits and situations. If then no creature is unclean of itself,

the law which made this difference must have had a particular intention and a moral foundation. The vision imparted to St. Peter immediately preceding the opening of his commission to the Gentiles, will fully explain the real object of this institution. The emblematical sheet which he saw let down from heaven, knit at the four corners, contained all manner of beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. When the voice said, "Rise, Peter, slay and eat;" the Apostle, who had yet to learn the reason of that law, which as a Jew he considered only in the literal sense, replied, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." To this scruple he received the reply, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." In the house of Cornelius, this mysterious exhibition was so completely interpreted, that the Apostle said to the assembly of converts, "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." This is an explanation of the vision and the institution; stating expressly that these animals which had been declared unclean, represented the different nations of mankind from whom the children of Israel were separated, and intended to be kept distinct till the ascension of the Messiah. But though none of the brute creatures can be pronounced unclean, with respect to turpitude, they may very fitly be said to represent the various characters among men. According to ordinary language, in all countries the moral qualities are compared to corresponding actions and propensities in the bestial tribes. The patient submission and persevering industry of one class, afford a striking and instructive contrast to the savage ferocity and ungovernable disposition of others.

Some are distinguished by habitual cleanliness, the

inoffensiveness of their manners, and the services which they render, both in life and death, unto mankind; while others are remarkable for filthiness, rapacious violence, and perpetual hostility to the human race. Similar varieties may be found among men, with this difference, that what is moral depravity in them, is only instinct in the inferior creatures. Now as there can be no community between harmless quadrupeds and beasts of prey, or the mild songsters of the grove and the ravenous birds of the air; so neither ought the servants of God to associate themselves with the workers of iniquity. This was the practical lesson taught under the law to ancient Israel, in the statute respecting animal distinctions. Being chosen above all nations, and set apart from them as a people who were to be holy unto the Lord, the Israelites had these regulations concerning meat, to keep them as much as possible from the contamination of idolatrous connections. The institution was indeed a standing apologue teaching the necessity of internal and external purity; and the contrast between clean and unclean animals, as well with regard to food as sacrifice, exhibited the opposite characteristics of believers and unbelievers. It was indeed a most significant expression, that the people under the immediate government of Heaven should be as docile, unoffending, and profitable, as the animals which were devoted to their use by an explicit grant. Much might be said on the moral truths conveyed by the due consideration of the natural properties which separate the two classes from each other. But it will be sufficient in this place to observe that the quadrupeds which divide the hoof and chew the cud, are more regular in their habits, gentle in their disposition, and beneficial in all respects, than those of an opposite character. It was no difficult matter then to comprehend the design of this institution, or to apply the restrictions to the par-

ticular circumstances of Israel ; but if any wanted an explication, it was provided for them in another part of the statute : “ I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people. Ye shall, *therefore*, put a difference between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean ; and ye shall not make your souls abominable by beast or by fowl, or by any manner of living thing that moveth upon the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. And ye shall be holy unto me ; for I the Lord am holy, which have *severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.*” Lev. xx. 24—26.

FEBRUARY THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

THE DIVINE BENEDICTION.

Numbers, vi. 23—26.—*On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee and keep thee ; The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee ; The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.*

It is impossible for any serious mind to read the Scriptures without being struck with the frequent indication of a plurality of persons in the Divine Essence. At the very opening of the sacred volume the name of God is given in this form ; and to show that it was not done in compliance with any particular idiom, when the account of man's creation comes to be related, a consultation is described in language which cannot be understood in any other sense than as expressing the deliberation of equal powers on some great purpose which they were about to ac-

compleish. "And **ALEHIM** (the plural of God) said, Let us make man in *our image*, after *our likeness*." Gen. i. 26.

So again, in consequence of the fall, we read of a similar counsel being taken, and the same form used in the Divine interposition of judgment upon the offenders. "And **JEHOVAH ALEHIM** said, Behold, the man is become as **ONE OF US**, to know good and evil: and now lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever; therefore the **JEHOVAH ALEHIM** sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken." Gen. iii. 22, 23. At the confusion of the impious device in the plain of Shinar also, Jehovah is described as saying, "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they understand not one another's speech." Gen. xi. 7. If this phraseology was purposely adopted to convey a lofty description* of the Divine Majesty, and nothing more, it will be difficult to account for the manner in which the person is represented as speaking to himself. In this case it is a peculiarity without elegance, and cannot be relieved from the charge of being an amphibology, tending to perplex the ideas of man in his contemplation of the Deity. The most simple language, in describing the energy of the Divine operations, would not only be true sublimity, but the safest for the instruction of the human mind, and to guard it from false notions of God and his works. Now the sacred history containing the passages just mentioned, is remarkable for this very simplicity of style, which, indeed, throughout constitutes its excellence and marks its sacred origin. When, therefore, we find the Almighty taking a plural name in his concerns with mankind, we must allow that some mystery in the Divine nature was implied, for no rational being will admit that revelation can in any degree be contrary

to the native dignity of truth, either in matter of fact or mode of expression; consequently what it declares of God, his nature, counsels, and designs, must be received upon his authority. The doctrine of a plurality in the Divine nature stands upon this foundation, and cannot be denied without explaining away the sense of Scripture in such a manner as amounts to a denial of its sacred origin. If the oracles of God stand in need of human interpretation, and are to be accepted only as the reason of man is able to explain them, it may be questioned whether they could have proceeded from inspiration. When the Almighty communicates information concerning his own essence and perfections, our gratitude for the gift should be accompanied with an entire belief of the declaration. As, therefore, in the history of the creation, the Author of all things constantly speaks of himself in the plural number, such a personal distinction in the Deity will be found entitled exactly to the same credit as the relation of the fact, that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The wisest of the Hebrew monarchs, who must have been well acquainted with his own language, so understood the Name in the Pentateuch, otherwise he would not have said, "Remember now thy **CREATORS** in the days of thy youth." Eccles. xii. 1. The word used by Solomon differs from that which is united to Jehovah in the Mosaic writings, but it is emphatically plural, and, being addressed to those who acknowledged only one God, must have been taken by them as a reference to the account of the formation of man, in the Book of Genesis. The plurality in both cases is expressive, and the monition of Solomon affords a plain proof that the national creed, in his time, contained this article, that by Jehovah Alehim, who made man, was denoted more than one person in the Divine Essence. Amidst a variety of other passages which might be produced in confirmation of the same truth,

the form of benediction appointed for the service of the sanctuary, to be used by Aaron and his successors, deserves particular consideration. "On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, JEHOVAH bless thee and keep thee : JEHOVAH make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee : JEHOVAH lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my NAME upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them." This trisagium contains those very blessings which in the economy of grace are communicated by each Person in the Holy Trinity. The formulary corresponds indeed with the apostolical valediction ; "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all ;" and both are included in the established order for the admission of members into the church of Christ ; "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Thus in the Levitical benediction, the love of God the Father was implored to bless and keep his people ; but God the Son was supplicated to shine upon them personally, and to impart his grace unto them ; while the Holy Spirit was entreated to give peace to their hearts by his fellowship and influence. This distinction in the blessings, and the triple form of impetration, could not have been given without some special intention suited to the Divine glory and the wants of his people. But like the law, to the services of which it was annexed, the benediction veiled spiritual gifts, the full explication of which could not be known by those who received the benefits in a mystery, till the coming of "Christ, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." Rom. ix. 5.

FEBRUARY THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

DISCONTENTED ISRAEL.

Numbers, xi. 6.—*There is nothing at all besides this manna before our eyes.*

AN undisturbed and prosperous state is not always the best for man; nor does it produce what too many are apt to imagine, a grateful and contented mind. They who enjoy worldly comforts in abundance, are frequently led to complain of fancied evils, and to feel a restless solicitude for the possession of things which can neither give pleasure nor promote usefulness. Instead of seeking for the blessing of God upon what we derive from his bounty, we too often convert his gifts into snares and poison, by becoming a prey to envy and discontent. In the round of business we sigh for ease and retirement; but when that wish is indulged, the want of employment is felt as a heavier oppression than the cares from which we were so anxious to obtain a release. The simple and plain diet, so conducive to health, is despised, and even loathed, when luxury attracts the eye, and intemperance has vitiated the appetite. When, therefore, we consider the murmurings of Israel, and with astonishment observe them lifting up their seditious voices, not only against Moses, but even the Lord himself, who had done such great things for them, we may moderate our surprize by an enlarged survey of human nature, and an impartial examination of our own hearts. The bread of heaven fed Israel from day to day, without being affected by a change of situation, variableness of weather, or the inclemency of seasons; yet this gracious supply became at last contemptible in the sight of the people, when the mixed multitude, by their lusting, reminded them of the dainties to which they had been accustomed in

Egypt. The mere recollection of that land where they had suffered so many hardships, and from whence they came out with so much glory to themselves and terror to their enemy, should have filled the hearts of this people with gratitude and their mouths with praise. But so little were the Israelites sensible of the blessings which raised them above all nations, that the sensuality of a mixed multitude made them weep for the fish, cucumbers, and melons, the leeks, garlick, and onions of Egypt, though they knew that the enjoyment of these things could be purchased only by the loss of liberty. Some allowance would have been made for their disquietude had they suffered absolute want; but their ingratitude was aggravated by the fact that they were at this very time supplied miraculously with food sufficient for them. But when an evil desire is once excited and indulged in the heart, the repetition of goodness only serves to increase its impatience, and to lessen its regard for present blessings. Like murmuring Israel, those persons who have set their affections on worldly objects which Providence has graciously denied them, are ready to say of the comforts in their possession, "There is nothing at all besides this manna before our eyes." Many persons have had their peace of mind destroyed by attending to the evil counsel which has taught them to despise a humble life and sequestered situation. False representations of the world create such an unhappy thirst for riches, honours, and pleasure, that the means of acquiring them become no more a matter of inquiry and consideration, than the slavery of sin and care with which they are too generally attended. No power of argument will prevail over persons under the influence of so pernicious a delusion; and the government of a people who are discontented without reason, is one of the most difficult and dangerous concerns in which consummate wisdom and integrity can be placed. Well then

might Moses complain, in this case, that the burthen was too heavy for him to bear; upon which the Lord, in compassion to his faithful servant, inspired seventy of the elders to assist him in the government.

The conduct of Moses exhibited a striking contrast to the character of his nation. When he received the information that Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp, and Joshua desired him to forbid them, the answer of this illustrious man breathed the most ardent piety and disinterested benevolence. "Enviest thou for my sake? Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!" While they were loading him with reproaches for bringing them out of Egypt, he was animated with the single desire to promote their temporal comfort and spiritual improvement. No selfish regard for his own glory, or resentment of the public ingratitude, could move him to displeasure, when others were raised to eminent distinction by supernatural endowments.

Persons in high authority are rarely disposed to encourage rival talents; but Moses, disregarding his own personal glory, rejoiced at the diffusion of knowledge, and the communication of those spiritual gifts which were essential to the qualification of rulers. Yet with this exalted liberality, there was mixed a portion of dissatisfaction and unbelief. Though the good man was contented to be, as the Apostle strongly speaks, "less than the least of all saints," he was so impatient under the opposition which he experienced from the people, as to say, "Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people?" and when the Lord promised that he would send sufficient to supply them for a month, he replied, "Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them?" Can this be the language of that chosen servant of

God, to whom was manifested a view of the Divine glory, and by whose hand such mighty signs and wonders were performed in Egypt and the wilderness? Surely then if Moses could be so forgetful of former mercies, and diffident of the power and goodness of God, it concerns us to watch very carefully and constantly over our hearts, that they become not a prey to unbelief. With such an instance upon record in the sacred history, we may learn the propriety of the Apostolical monition, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." 1 Cor. x. 12. That the error of Moses was great, may be inferred from the rebuke which he received: "Is the Lord's hand waxed short? Thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee, or not." A wind from the Lord brought up from the coast of the Red Sea prodigious flocks of creatures, to which our translators have given the name of quails; but of whatever species they were, the supply was abundantly more than sufficient to satisfy the present wants of the people. But the sin which occasioned this miraculous gift was punished by it, for many died "while the flesh was yet between their teeth." This untimely death was most probably the effect of gluttony and intemperance, which seems to be confirmed also by the name of the place where this judgment occurred, being altered to Kibroth-hattaavah, that is, "the graves of lust." Thus man, who knows not what is best for him, too often makes a sacrifice of health to the indulgence of his passions, and at length falls a victim to the gratification of inordinate desires. To preserve that tranquil disposition and habitual confidence in God, without which there can be no comfort or security in this world, we shall do well to make the prayer of Agur our daily supplication: "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me; lest I be full

and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." Prov. xxx. 8, 9.

FEBRUARY THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

AARON AND MIRIAM.

Numbers, xii. 2.—*And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the Lord heard it.*

THERE is hardly a baser passion in the human heart than envy, which corrodes every principle of benevolence and gratitude towards man, and even weakens, if it does not entirely destroy, the sense of duty to God. This evil disposition proceeds from a false idea of merit, and they who are unhappily affected by it, always think themselves either wiser or more virtuous than their contemporaries, especially those who are the principal objects of their malevolence. Like other bad qualities, however, it has various shades and gradations of malignity; though when indulged till it is habitual, the mind infected by it, becomes the seat of every wickedness, and covered with unbelief, thick as the darkness of Egypt. Its virulence is increased in proportion to the excellence and eminence of the person upon whom it fastens; and even the propinquity of blood, instead of being any security from these attacks, usually renders them more perfidious and inveterate. This baneful spirit is of such an imposing nature, that persons of religious pretensions are sometimes infected by it to a degree of which they have little or no conception. It passes with them, indeed, as Christian prudence or fervent zeal, a watchful concern for the interests of truth, and an earnest desire to advance the cause of

virtue. They who are under this delusion, fancy that their opposition to individuals and established orders, is only enmity against corruption and error; consequently, that the endeavour to displace them from the rank which they hold in society, arises from the pure principle of regard for the public good. According to their own representations, the fervour of their minds, and the incessant activity in which they are engaged, have no other spring but the unmixed love of mankind, and a conscientious obedience to the dictates of justice and religion. But He who inspecteth the inmost thoughts of the heart, and traceth through all their windings the motives of words and deeds, discerns behind all this fallacious guise the dark conclave of jealousy and pride, selfishness and ambition. No doubt Aaron and Miriam could have set up some specious excuses, if they had been called to account in a popular assembly for their treatment of Moses. His marriage with a woman of Ethiopia, was the open plea for this attempt to subvert the constituted authority; but that was only intended to inflame the public mind, for the projectors of discord thus confessed the principle by which they were actuated: "Hath the Lord spoken only by Moses? hath he not also spoken by us?" They were obliged to admit that Moses was invested with a Divine commission; but as the gifts of the Spirit had also been occasionally imparted to themselves, for special purposes, they made these distinctions the ground of claim to an equal share in the government. It seems that Aaron and Miriam were apprehensive that the succession would be confined to the family of Moses; to avert which, they started this objection to his marriage with a strange woman. But in all this they acted with the customary meanness of little minds, who colour their designs with some plausible pretences, which conceal the treachery from superficial observation. Moses ap-

pears to have been unacquainted with the base conduct of his relations, which was an aggravation of their guilt ; but if he knew it, his silence, and the submission of his case to God, proves that he was indeed one of the meekest men upon earth. The encomium, however, which gives him this character, has no proper connection with that part of the history where it is inserted. The words thus abruptly introduced, evidently relate to the judgement pronounced by the Lord : " Hear now my words : if there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches ; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold : wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses ? " Then should follow what is included in the parenthesis, and which, according to the most correct manuscripts, ought to be read thus : " Now the man Moses gave forth more answers from the Lord than all the men of the earth. " The punishment inflicted upon Miriam shows that the offence originated in her discontent and envy, excited probably by some family quarrel, in which she had the art to involve her elder brother. But the behaviour of Moses to her and Aaron, presents a beautiful picture of an exalted and generous disposition, not only forgiving injuries, but anxious to return good for evil. The whole narrative, indeed, is a proof of the liberality and candour of Moses, who disguiseth no fault either in himself or his kindred, but lays every error open with the same fullness of detail in which he relates the murmurings and ingratitude of the people. This history exhibits the danger of giving way to resentment, and indulging party sentiments. Where these are encouraged, the spirit of love cannot long subsist ; and when they

rule the tongue, boasting great things, a fire may be kindled which the authors of it are unable to extinguish. Let us then attend to the caution of the Apostle: "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying, and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." James, iii. 13—18.

MARCH THE FIRST.

REPORT OF THE SPIES.

Numbers, xiii. 33.—*And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants; and we were in our sight as grasshoppers; and so we were in their sight.*

FEAR is a very pernicious passion when it interferes with the duties of man. There is indeed a commendable diffidence and caution which should attend every pursuit in life that is to be regulated wholly by the exercise of human skill and judgment. But when the principles of faith are clearly revealed, and the rules of practice grounded upon them are exactly laid down, doubt and irresolution would be worse than avowed infidelity and open hostility. Religion cannot admit of any neutrality; for being an active service, it requires entire obedience and continual

exertions. The Captain of our salvation hath said, "He that is not with me is against me" (Matt. xii. 30); for the man who timidly shrinks from the cause of truth and virtue gives every advantage to error and impiety. This world is to us what the wilderness was to the Israelites. We have no inheritance here as Christians, but we seek one to come; even a kingdom which is secured by the Divine promise to all who follow their Redeemer in faith and patience. The present life is a state of pilgrimage and warfare, resembling the journeyings of Israel; but unhappily too many, like that refractory people, either fall back in the hour of trial through fear, or bring destruction upon themselves by their rashness and presumption. The persons who were sent to examine the state of Canaan, its strength, and productions, returned with the account that it was indeed a good land, flowing with milk and honey; and as a proof of its fertility, they brought with them some of its choicest fruits. But when the people were exhorted to go up at once and possess the land, ten of these spies began to alter their report, which, like most cowards, they did by contradicting themselves. The land they had before confessed was good, but now on a sudden they found that it was not sufficient to support its inhabitants, though the population was great and the people were strong. But the more effectually to spread the spirit of disaffection, these men were not ashamed to acknowledge the fears which possessed them while they were engaged in exploring the land.

"All the people that we saw in it," said they, "are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants; and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers; and so we were in their sight." The degenerate mind magnifies dangers and multiplies difficulties, when required to discharge any arduous duty; and it will

not even scruple to lessen its own powers, if called upon to exert them in the cause of righteousness. Yet on other occasions it is forward, and uncharitable enough in condemning the pusillanimity of others, and in opposing with violence those who are incapable of resistance. Thus the Israelites, dastardly as they were, on the confines of a country which could only be gained by conquest, were active in rebellion, and ready to stone Caleb and Joshua for making a honest report of the land, and urging an immediate entrance upon it, in obedience to the commandment of the Lord, and an unshaken reliance upon his promise. These two faithful witnesses stood up in the presence of the mutinous assembly, and in the spirit of ardent piety endeavoured to undeceive their brethren, and to convince them that their duty and interest lay in the prompt execution of the Divine precept. "And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, 'The land which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us; their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us; fear them not.'" This animating address, instead of removing the evil impression produced by the disheartening statement of the other spies, only served to raise the popular fury against Caleb and Joshua, whose regard for truth and the Divine honour, would not suffer them to be moved by the fear of man. In the conduct of Israel we may perceive an exact picture of those nominal Christians who are so much pleased with religion as to be desirous of its comforts in this life, and its enjoyments in that which is to come; but who are unwilling to enter upon the course of inward dis-

cipline which is necessary to procure the one ; and who by yielding to temptation instead of resisting the powers of darkness, renounce the other. So long as things run smoothly with them, and nothing is required but an outward conformity to duties easy to be performed, they are satisfied ; but when the time comes to put on their armour, and they are called into the field to contend for victory against the world, the flesh, and the devil, despondency takes possession of their hearts, or infidelity brings them back to the bondage of corruption. Many, like these base spirits in the wilderness, keep hovering on the borders of the promised land, wishing to enjoy there that “rest which remaineth for the people of God ;” but afraid to appear openly on the side of religious truth, lest they should become objects of contempt. “Eternal joys are desirable,” they say, “but the service exacted for them is hard ; the Divine promises are good, but the enemies to be encountered are formidable ; while man is an erring and feeble creature, too ignorant to direct his own steps, and therefore incapable of resisting successfully a spiritual adversary.” These persons rely upon the Divine mercy, as an excuse for their indolence ; and they trust that God will supply their lack of service by the free display of his sovereign grace. A few duties sincerely performed, and some faith in the Divine word, they flatter themselves will make up for all other deficiencies ; and thus they go on to the end of their days, living on easy terms with the world ; yet, in the language of the apostate prophet, saying, “Let us die the death of the righteous, and let our last end be like theirs.” Num. xxiii. 10. But the heavenly Canaan, like the terrestrial, is the price of conquest, for so He declared, in whose strength and righteousness only we can obtain the victory : “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” Matt. xi. 12. The nature of this violence

our Lord himself explained a little before to his disciples ; “ He that loveth father or, mother more than me, is not worthy of me ; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth or loveth his life shall lose it ; and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it.” Matt. x. 37—39.

MARCH THE SECOND.

THE DIVINE INDIGNATION.

Numbers, xiv. 34.—*And ye shall know my breach of promise.*

DIVINE truth being immutable, the purposes and promises of God can neither change nor fail ; for “ with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” James, i. 17. It may, therefore, be matter of serious concern, and of perplexing difficulty to pious minds, that such a declaration as this should be made, in the name of Jehovah, to unbelieving Israel. “ After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days (each day for a year), shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years ; and ye shall know my breach of promise.” This, however, is one of those instances in which our translation, excellent and faithful as it is in the main, not only falls short of the original, but does injury to the sense. There is nothing in the sacred text to correspond with the word *promise* ; and the interpolation in this place is particularly unhappy, because it tends to confound ordinary readers, and to provoke the sarcasms of scoffers. It is certain that the land of Canaan was assured to the posterity of Jacob by covenant ; but the manner and time of fulfilling this engagement

solely depended on the Divine pleasure. The promise was made to the family of Israel, not to any particular generation; and though the chosen seed were preserved in Egypt, and delivered from thence by virtue of this contract, yet it depended upon their conduct whether they should themselves be favoured with the inheritance. There could be no breach of promise then in cutting off these Israelites from the possession of Canaan, unless the declaration had been specific that they should enjoy it in their own persons. But nothing of the kind was given to the men who came out of Egypt; and we find that they proved themselves unworthy of the trust by their cowardice, and of the favour by a perpetual disposition to mutiny and rebellion. Too many of the slavish principles remained in these men, and the pravity of Egyptian manners had taken so deep a root in them, that, considering the matter in the mere light of policy only, it was prudent to let that race pass away, before the conquest of Canaan should be undertaken. Such indeed is the usual course of the Divine economy in adjusting the times and seasons of events, together with the means by which they are to be accomplished, and the characters of those who are to have the principal concern in them. Base minds are incapable of great things; and if they venture to embark in any important design, it fails by their rashness, or is ruined by their ill management. When the Israelites saw the faithless reporters fall beneath the vengeance of Heaven, and heard the sentence of excision pronounced against themselves; they were roused into ardour, and resolved to enter the land by force. In defiance of the Divine counsel and prediction, they ventured to march into the mountainous country, inhabited by the most warlike tribes, who routed them with great slaughter. Thus did these men contribute by their own presumption to the execution of the decree, for after this dis-

comfiture they were obliged to retreat into the desert, and could make no farther attempts to gain the land of promise. On the former occasion, when they were commanded to go up and take possession, they refused, and consulted about the choice of a leader to conduct them back to Egypt. This was their breach of the covenant, by which they forfeited all claim to the Divine favour and presence in their undertakings. Hence it was expressly declared that the Lord would not go with them in their expedition, notwithstanding which they proceeded in the presumptuous enterprise, leaving the ark and Moses in the camp.

Here the breach was completed, and the Israelites soon experienced the effects of it in the punishment which those always bring upon themselves who rebel against God. The denunciation then is explained in the circumstances attending the fate of the persons to whom it was addressed; "Ye shall know my breach by the want of my presence for your protection, when pride and folly shall bring you into danger." If instead of the word breach we substitute separation or breaking-off, the sentence will be cleared of that obscurity with which it is at present embarrassed, and the sense will be thereby rendered plain to the most common understanding. When men forsake God he may be truly said to separate himself, or withdraw the influence of his grace from them, which was literally verified in the case of these Israelites, who by their cowardly disaffection incurred the Divine judgment, and by their temerity hastened its execution. This is the ordinary way in which the indignation of the Most High, against sin, is manifested upon transgressors. Their very crimes become the instruments of punishment, and through their vain imaginations they fall into many snares and temptations from which those persons are exempt, who, relying stedfastly upon the promises of God, are ready to obey all his precepts.

This remarkable history also affords a striking illustration of the awful truth, that the season of grace has its prescribed limits, beyond which there is no redemption, "but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and of fiery indignation." Heb. x. 27.

The children of Israel, after many trials and miracles, were brought to the confines of the promised land, of which they were commanded to take instant possession, but they refused; the consequence of which was, that when they attempted the conquest in their own strength, "the Amorites chased them as bees, and destroyed them in Seir, even unto Hormah." Dent. i. 44. Thus many pass through life, enjoying all the means of grace; yet neither the ordinary visitations of Providence, the judgments and mercies which they experience, nor the repeated invitations of Divine love, which they receive, prove effectual in working that change of heart which is necessary to prepare them for the heavenly inheritance. When, therefore, the hour comes which calls them away into another state, like the foolish virgins they awake from their lethargy, and find that their religion consisted of nothing more than an external profession. They seek for redemption which is past for ever, and in this dreadful exigency, when, with some formal and delusive substitutes for that inward holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord, they pray earnestly "Open to us," his answer to their importunities is, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not." Let his exhortation then be duly impressed upon our minds, and form the constant monitor for the regulation of our lives: "Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh." Matt. xxv. 13.

MARCH THE THIRD.

THE SABBATH-BREAKER.

Numbers, xv. 36.—*And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses.*

THE laws instituted for the government of Israel were adapted to the peculiar circumstances and character of that people, as being the immediate subjects of the Almighty. Hence many of these statutes contain restrictions enforced by penal sanctions, which may seem narrow, rigid, and severe, because the reason for enacting them is either not considered or understood. By not attending to the extraordinary distinction which set this nation apart from all others, the system of polity belonging to Israel, together with the judgments executed by them and upon them, become mysterious and unintelligible to believing minds; while some again presume to condemn the whole system who are ignorant of its design and insensible to its beauty. There have been, on the other hand, persons so preposterous as to think of modelling human governments upon this extraordinary plan; and some Christians, little regarding the liberty of which the Gospel has made them partakers, still fancy that the Mosaical regulations for the observance of the Sabbath, are obligatory upon those who are under a better covenant. Their mistake proceeds from the want of considering this institution in its character as it related to the Israelites, being with them of a mixed nature, partly political and partly religious. It was adopted as a sign between Jehovah and his people, or became the test of

their obedience to his government, and therefore the violation of it amounted to high treason in the fullest sense. In no other way could they injure his dominion than by breaking in upon his exclusive property, and robbing him of those things which he had by an express commandment set apart for his own service. These may be said to have constituted his peculiar honours upon earth; and, therefore, death was justly denounced against those who broke the Sabbath, profaned the Sanctuary, or blasphemed the Holy Name. But though it was declared soon after the revelation of the Decalogue, that whosoever did any work on the Sabbath-day, "that soul should be cut off from his people;" yet the manner in which this judgment should be executed was not mentioned. This seems to have been purposely reserved for the particular exercise of the Divine authority, when an occasion should arrive to put the law in force. Accordingly, when some of the people brought before Moses and Aaron, in the midst of the congregation, a man whom they found gathering sticks on the Sabbath-day, he was ordered into custody till the pleasure of the Lord was known concerning him. The governors of Israel well knew that the offence was highly capital, yet they could not venture to punish the criminal without first consulting the Divine oracle. This was one of those cases which they considered as belonging wholly to the jurisdiction of Jehovah, and therefore to him they referred the determination. Moses acted here as he had before done in the case of Shelomith's son, who was convicted of having blasphemed the name of the Lord (Lev. xxiv. 10), which, under the particular circumstances of Israel, was certainly the most heinous offence, even against the commonwealth, of which any person could be guilty. But on both occasions we find the supreme court acting with the same caution, and keeping each criminal in ward

till the mind of the Lord should be known concerning him. This may serve to prove that no magistrate has authority to punish religious offences, simply as such, but must leave them to the judgment of that tribunal where all hearts are open, and from which no secrets are hid.

In the case of the Israelites it was absolutely necessary to make even terrible examples, considering the support which this people daily received from above, and their continual propensity to follow the evil customs of the nations around them.

To have passed over, therefore, such crimes lightly, would have been no less injurious to the society than derogatory to the Divine Majesty; since even the moral improvement of the people depended upon their due regard and observance of the precepts and ordinances, solemnly imparted from heaven for their government. But though the punishments denounced and executed upon the transgressors of the first table, were peculiar to, and ceased with the Hebrew theocracy, the laws themselves were to be of perpetual force. They are indeed as sacred and obligatory now, as they were when first promulgated from Mount Sinai, and no violator of them will escape the vengeance due to his transgression. The Almighty has indeed reserved the judgment to himself, but it will assuredly fall upon those who profane his name and dishonour his Sabbaths, if not in this world at least in the next. In general, however, an observable difference will be found in the present state between those who fear the Lord and those who fear him not, with respect to the tranquillity of their minds, the peace of their families, and the degree of credit which they obtain in the world. When the Sabbath begins to be treated with indifference, and men pay just as much respect to one day as another, morality will have no stronger influence upon their minds than as it is regulated by personal convenience.

Human laws, let them be ever so excellent, will be then viewed with jealousy as restrictions of liberty, and government will want that best of all securities, the obedience of willing minds. There can indeed be no religion in society without the Sabbath, which is the standing means of keeping the heavenly flame alive upon earth. It is the duty, therefore, of all who have the national welfare at heart, to reverence in their own conduct this Divine institution, and to see that those over whom they have authority do at least pay an external respect to the Lord's day, by cessation from labour, and an attendance on public worship. Thus may the Divine blessing be expected to rest both upon the community and individuals, agreeable to the promise of God by the evangelical prophet; "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the Holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Isa. lviii. 13, 14.

On the other hand, those who slight the ordinances of God are thus described: "They swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn; and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shckel great, and falsifying the balances of deceit? The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works." Amos, viii. 4, 7.

MARCH THE FOURTH.

THE REBELLION OF KORAH.

Numbers, xvi. 48.—*And he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stayed.*

REBELLION is one of those offences which the Scriptures condemn in the strongest terms, as being an immediate attack upon the Divine sovereignty. Obedience to government is uniformly enforced as one of the primary duties which we owe to GOD, from whom the institution is derived, whatever may be the character and conduct of those by whom it is administered. Both Testaments agree in this, and our blessed Lord, by precept and example, inculcated the principle upon his followers in the plainest terms. "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto, God the things which are God's," said he unto the artful Pharisees who wanted to accuse him of seditious designs. And his conduct was correspondent, as appeared in the miracle which he wrought to pay the tribute-money, his reproof of the Apostle for resisting the officers and soldiers in the garden of Gethsemane, and his reply to Pilate, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." Such being the declarations of our Lord, with respect to the obedience due from subjects to the sovereign power, it may well excite surprise that any who call themselves his followers should have presumed to evade the force of his authority, by asserting the supposed right of the people to resist their rulers and change their government. But whatever may be said by cunning, ambitious, and disaffected men, the rule is plain and the law express, that the constituted powers are of God, which whosoever resisted, is guilty of opposing the Divine

ordinance at the risk of eternal condemnation. The history of Korah and his company shows the nature of this sin; and the judgment with which it was visited, proves its enormity in the sight of God. These persons were famous in the congregation and men of renown; Korah belonged to the tribe of Levi, in which the priesthood was settled; and Dathan and Abiram to that of Reuben, the elder son of Jacob. Their pretensions were plausible, and, like most factious demagogues, they endeavoured to gain the popular favour by representing their designs as calculated solely for the public good. "Ye take too much upon you," said they to Moses and Aaron, "seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them; and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" This was the language of the Levitical insurgents, and the doctrine which they laid down was well adapted to please the multitude, who were thus put upon the same footing with their governors. Dathan and Abiram set up no peculiar claims to the priesthood, but, from the fancied primacy of their tribe they considered themselves as injured in being kept from the magistracy. This ambition, however, they artfully concealed, and revolted against Moses under the colour that he wanted to reduce all Israel into a state of blind subjection to his will. "Is it a small thing," said they, "that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us? Moreover, thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards; wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up."

In this confederacy we see the close affinity between sacrilege and rebellion. Korah and his associates regarded the high-priesthood with envy; and to

obtain the object of their ambition they made no scruple of setting aside at once the distinction which had been fixed by the Almighty. In defiance of his own establishment they placed the origin of all power in the hands of the people; and for the same purpose they endeavoured to annul the Divine commission of Moses and Aaron. This levelling principle struck at the very foundations of the whole polity of Israel; and whenever the order which God has settled for the government of his church becomes an object of contempt, the subversion of the state is sure to follow.

Korah and his company began with undermining the ecclesiastical authority, and, to effect their ends, they clamoured against the ministers of God as having encroached upon the rights of the people; who were equally holy with themselves. Dathan and Abiram, with their adherents, were contented to follow the others; but in addition to the ground of rebellion taken by them, they charged the rulers of Israel with a violation of the contract, on the faith of which the people came out of Egypt. The alluring doctrine of Korah, so flattering to human pride, spread rapidly among the multitude, insomuch that when the schismatics appeared before the tabernacle, at the challenge of Moses, they were supported by the whole congregation. Thus relying upon the public sanction, these men seem to have deceived themselves into the persuasion that their cause was just.

Moses and Aaron stood alone in the Divine presence, while all Israel besides were gathered around Korah; so that here, indeed, if ever, the popular voice was manifest in favour of a revolution, both civil and religious. But the judgments which immediately followed fully demonstrated the folly and wickedness of making the multitude judges of their rulers. The punishments of these rebellious factions

were different, according to the nature of their crimes. They who appeared before the Lord, in opposition to his lawful ministers, perished by fire from heaven; while those who endeavoured to overturn the political constitution of Israel went down alive into the pit of destruction. Nor did the people who had suffered themselves to be deluded into so foul a revolt, escape from the vengeance justly due to their folly and ingratitude. The seduction of error, like a plague, runs through the mass of society, when it is broached by men of commanding talents, and is rendered attractive by taking off the restraints of authority. Insensible to the tremendous visitations which they had just witnessed, the Israelites began to vent this seditious language against their leaders: "Ye have killed the people of the Lord." The perversity of man can scarcely be supposed to equal this presumption, in ascribing the manifest judgments of God to the vindictive disposition of his ministers. Yet it is not uncommon to find the awful dispensations of Heaven, which human sagacity could neither foresee nor prevent, preposterously charged upon those in power. The people in general, instead of looking for the cause of the calamity which alarms them, in their own corruptions, are too apt to seek it in the conduct of those above them. Superiour integrity, in such a case, so far from attracting respect, only serves to provoke the malice of such wayward spirits, who having no sense of virtue themselves are always ready to suspect the motives of others. When any nation becomes so depraved as to slight its laws, and insult the authority by which they are enacted and administered, its ruin is not far off. The vitiated state of the moral elements gives force to the contagion, which generally produces anarchy and ends in despotism. The refractory Israelites, instead of being humbled by the terrible examples made of the rebellious chiefs, still adhered

to the pernicious principles taught by those deceivers, whose fate they affected to lament as that of persons who had suffered in the cause of righteousness. It was necessary therefore to purge out this leaven by a more sensible visitation : and the plague which their depravity occasioned, made such quick and violent ravage among the insurgents, that before Aaron could offer an atonement for them, “ there fell fourteen thousand and seven hundred, besides those that died about the matter of Korah.” Thus rebellion, which usually begins with the pretence of correcting abuses, and an attempt to recover usurped rights, becomes the most dreadful scourge of those who are carried away by the delusion. Should the Almighty in mercy at last spare such an infatuated nation, it will only be after the display of his judgments, and for the sake of the righteous who are therein. Aaron stood between the living and the dead ; and nothing but the vital power of religion can preserve any people from that destruction, which is the inevitable consequence of all those who are abandoned to their own devices. Let this history, therefore, teach us the duty and necessity of obeying all the ordinances of God, as the surest means of securing his blessing, and of avoiding confusion and every evil work. The advice of wisdom will be found the safest for maintaining that public and private happiness, which every person ought to have in view, and by his conduct endeavour to promote as far as lies in his power. “ My son, fear thou the Lord and the king ; and meddle not with them that are given to change ; for their calamity shall rise suddenly, and who knoweth the ruin of them both ?” Prov. xxiv. 21, 22.

MARCH THE FIFTH.

AARON'S ROD.

Numbers, xvii. 10.—*And the Lord said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not.*

By a remarkable condescension to the infirmities of his people, and to prevent the recurrence of rebellious projects against the order which he had settled, Jehovah directed the princes of the tribes to bring their rods of office to Moses, that he might lay them up in the tabernacle of the congregation before the ark of testimony. The rod of Aaron was also commanded to be placed with them, and the assembled elders were informed that the Divine choice would be manifested by the miraculous blossoming of his rod in whose family the ecclesiastical government should be established. The chiefs of Israel readily agreed to this equitable proposal, and each of them brought his staff of authority to Moses, who wrote their respective names upon them, and that of Aaron upon his rod. Thus all these persons were upon a fair and equal footing, for no partiality could give an advantage to one over another, in the manner of election; nor was it possible that any collusion or contrivance could effect such a change as that which was promised to take place in the rod, to the exclusion of the rest. Neither Moses nor Aaron could substitute another staff for that to which all the people were familiar; and if they could, it was utterly impossible to make it produce blossoms which should deceive so many persons, who by their situation were capable, and from inclination were ready, to detect any artifice

which might be used to impose upon them. But farther, to put an effectual stop to any such suspicion, and utterly to confute the gainsaying of infidels, in every succeeding age, this highly-favoured rod became a continual memorial of the Divine power and goodness, by exhibiting proofs of perpetual vegetation. No human art could keep the shoot of any tree in this state long after its separation from the parent stock; and in an arid land, such as that in which the Israelites were condemned to sojourn during the life of Moses, it was beyond the power of the most crafty to supply a succession of blooming branches from day to day without discovery. Had the germination of Aaron's rod been confined to the mere conviction of those persons who were concerned in the rebellion of Korah, great as the miracle was, it would probably have ceased to affect the minds of the next generation. But when every Israelite knew that this wonderful rod, in all circumstances and in every season, exhibited constant evidence of supernatural power, by "bringing forth buds, blooming blossoms, and yielding almonds," no doubt could be entertained of the original fact, or of the design it was intended to answer. With the fruitful rod this people must have contemplated with reverence the Divine institution of that holy priesthood, which it represented. The following observations of a pious writer upon this miracle, are too excellent to be given in any other language than his own. "These twelve rods are not laid up in the several cabinets of their owners, but are brought forth and laid before the Lord. It is fit God should make choice of his own attendants. Even we men hold it injurious to have servants obtruded upon us by others. Never shall that man have comfort in his ministry whom God hath not chosen. The great Commander of the world hath set every man in his station; to one he hath said, Stand thou in this tower and watch; to

another, Make thou good these trenches ; to a third, Dig thou in this mine. He that gives, and knows our abilities, can best set us our work. This rod was the pastoral staff of Aaron, the great shepherd of Israel. God testifies his approbation of his charge by the fruit. That a rod cut off from the tree should blossom, it was strange ; but that in one night it should bear buds, blossoms, fruit, and that both ripe and hard, it was highly miraculous. The same power that revives the dead plants of winter in the spring, doth it here without earth, without time, without sun, that Israel might see and grant, it was no reason, his choice should be limited, whose power is unlimited. Fruitfulness is the best argument of the calling of God : not only all the plants of his setting, but the very boughs cut off from the body of them, will flourish. And that there may not want a succession of increase, here are fruit, blossoms, buds ; both proof and hope inseparably mixed.*

That the rod of Aaron should have been so distinguished, while that of his brother was unnoticed, by which such marvels were wrought in Egypt and the wilderness, may appear extraordinary. The authority of Moses was assailed in the late insurrection as much as that of Aaron ; and therefore it might seem equally necessary that his divine mission should be miraculously displayed on this occasion. But the determination of the one case was decisive of the other ; since where the ecclesiastical and civil powers were intimately blended, as in the government of Israel, the Divine sanction of either authority was sufficient for the whole. There was, however, something of special import in this selection of the rod of Aaron rather than that of Moses.

* Bishop Hall's Contemplations, lib. vii. cont. 1.

In the establishment of the theocracy many and mighty wonders were performed by the chosen instrument of Divine power; but as this government had one great object in which it was to terminate, no care was taken for the conservation of the rod which Moses carried as the sign of his being the vicegerent of Jehovah. The political constitution, with the judicial and ceremonial institutes peculiar to Israel, were to end in the coming of a better covenant; but the priesthood being spiritual was to continue through all time, purged indeed from the obscurities of the law, and perfected by Him, of whom Aaron was the representative to the antient church. The divine authority of the priestly office was made manifest by the miraculous buds, blossoms, and fruits of the rod cut from the almond-tree, which remained ever fresh and blooming. This figured in a lively manner the perpetual verdure and sovereign efficacy of his priesthood, who "concedeth forth as a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch growing out of his roots." The blessings resulting to the church, redeemed by his blood, are thus predicted by the evangelical prophet: "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." Isa. xi. 2—4.

By his death and resurrection this Divine Person became "the tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations." Rev. xxii. 2. All who are engrafted into communion with him, and who abide

in him by faith, partake of his fruitfulness, and they shall continue to flourish in holiness unto eternal life, through that grace which is derived only from his merits and intercession. Such was his declaration and promise to the church, a little before the consummation of his great work: "Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing." John, xv. 4, 5.

MARCH THE SIXTH.

SMITING OF THE ROCK.

Numbers, xx. 13.—*This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the Lord, and he was sanctified in them.*

NUMEROUS were the mercies and awful the judgments witnessed by Israel in the wilderness; but ungrateful for the one and insensible to the other, this people appear to have grown more perverse and unbelieving in proportion to the bounties which they received and the chastisements which they suffered. After the schism and rebellion excited by Korah and his company, the spring which was miraculously opened in Horeb ceased at the fountain; but the people, instead of recalling their offences to remembrance, or applying to the Author of every good and perfect gift, from whom alone the blessing originally came, "gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron." This unthankful generation had often experienced the tender and sympathetic concern of their venerable chiefs, inter-

eeding for them effectually in the time of need, and averting from them the indignation of the Almighty, when by their evil conduct they had provoked his displeasure. The Israelites well knew that the stream which had so long accompanied them in their circuitous course, proceeded wholly from the Divine power and goodness; yet in a strange spirit of infidelity they rebelled against their leaders for drying up that which they could neither create nor continue. With equal impiety and ingratitude they complained of having been brought out of captivity; and to show still further how little they had profited by former visitations for their iniquities, the fate of Korah and his party was mentioned in terms of reproach against the Lord and his ministers. "Would God," said they, "that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? It is no place of seed, or of figs, or vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink." The dissatisfied mind knows no bounds; but if it has one real ground of complaint, it will make innumerable others that are merely imaginary. Instead of being thankful for benefits already received, and for substantial blessings still in possession, the discontented, upon every little privation, begin to murmur because their condition is not abundant and luxuriant. Like the Israelites, who wanted water for a day or two, they forget former mercies, and are utterly regardless of the Divine favour, which, in withholding from them the riches and honours of the world, secures them from many of its worst temptations; and, in obliging them to pursue an active course of life, preserves them from numerous snares and evils that surround the dwellings of wealth and grandeur. The want of

water was no doubt a serious calamity ; but the Israelites, not content with complaining of the temporary loss and inconvenience they really sustained, gave vent to their malignity because they had neither figs, vines, nor pomegranates. Thus assaulted on account of an affliction which they could neither foresee nor remedy, Moses and Aaron quitted the tumultuous assembly, and prostrated themselves before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle. The Divine glory soon consoled them for the distress occasioned by the seditious spirit and vengeful language of the people. Without any censure being passed upon the congregation, either for their conduct towards the Lord or his ministers, the latter were directed to gather the assembly before the rock, and to speak unto it in their presence. This forbearance and goodness ought to have allayed the resentment of Moses and his brother, while the promise which was given them, that the rock should give forth its water abundantly, was sufficient to strengthen their faith and obedience. But agitated by private feeling and hurried away by intemperate zeal, these rulers of Israel now acted in their own spirit, which made them unmindful of the commission they had received and the gracious example set them by the long-suffering of Jehovah. The directions and the promise were equally clear ; but an unbecoming sense of their own wrongs led these good men to exceed their instructions, and thus to injure his honour whose servants they were, and in whose name only they ought to have acted. Moses, however, instead of speaking to the rock as he had been commanded, turned and addressed himself to the assembly in words which betrayed anger towards them and doubt of the Divine verity. "Hear now ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock?" By this question and reproach Moses seems to have considered the result as

uncertain, though he had the word of God for his assurance. His action corresponded with the intemperance of his speech, for he lifted up his hand and smote the rock twice; upon which the hidden fountain again burst forth, and copious streams refreshed the people and their cattle.

Thus was Jehovah faithful to his engagement; but as Moses suffered the violence of the congregation to "mroveke his spirit, so that he spoke unadvisedly with his lips: it went ill with him for their sakes." Ps. cxi. 23. That both he and Aaron had great reason to be grieved at the folly and ingratitude of the nation over whom they presided, must be allowed; but the fault for which they were censured and punished was that of being more concerned about their own honour than that of God. The question, "Must we fetch you water?" not only implied want of confidence in the declaration that had been given them, but it had a direct tendency to fix the public attention rather upon the ministers than the Author of mercy. On a former occasion the rock was to be smitten; but now it was only to be spoken to in the Divine name; and that without any censure of the people. Zeal, according to godliness, is different from the anger which burns not so much against error as those who are under its influence, and which mingles with its hatred of vice a bitter and uncharitable spirit towards the persons of those who fall by its temptations. Much as Moses and Aaron had to complain of, yet the stations they filled required the utmost circumspection over their own tempers, and the sacrifice of individual considerations to the general good. This lesson was practically taught them by Jehovah; but, contrary to his gracious example and precept, they met the assembly in wrath, and by thus allowing their passions to prevail in the exercise of public duty they neglected to sanctify the Lord in the presence of his people.

Self-will was the cause of that unbelief which led them into the rash act of performing the Divine commission in their own names, attended with circumstances that were not enjoined. Thus the miracle which was intended to glorify God in the hearts of his people, became the occasion of strife and contention between them and their rulers. The Almighty did, indeed, sanctify himself by fulfilling the promise he had given, though his ministers so grossly erred in the spirit and manner of discharging their duty.

While this history teaches the necessity of guarding the heart against the indulgence of angry passion, which, by lessening the principle of love to man, tends to weaken our faith in God; it also reminds us that in this world the gifts of Divine grace are entrusted to earthen vessels. The most exalted messengers of God are but feeble instruments of themselves, and liable to fall into many errors and temptations, some peculiar to the course of their studies and enquiries; and others arising from the way to which superior merit is always exposed. In contemplating, therefore, the conduct of Moses and Aaron, with the judgment which came upon them for their disobedience, let us attend to the monition of the Apostle: "Now all these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." 1 Cor. x. 11, 12.

MARCH THE SEVENTH.

THE DEATH OF AARON.

Numbers, xx. 28.—*And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there in the top of the mount.*

THREE is something very affecting in parting from those with whom we have been long in the habits of close intimacy; by whose talents we have profited, and whose virtues have contributed to our spiritual improvement. These awful scenes bring many occurrences fresh to remembrance, some which excite pleasing sensations mixed with tender regret, and others that call forth the most humiliating considerations and mortifying apprehensions. Such, we may well suppose, were the various agitations which passed in the mind of Moses when he received this command, "Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up into mount Hor; and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son; and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there."

This injunction was given to the leaders of Israel soon after their lamentable breach of duty at the waters of Meribah, and in pursuance of the sentence, which in consequence of it was then delivered, that neither of them should enter the land of promise. Thus Moses saw in the fate of his brother the absolute certainty of his own, which could not fail to produce in his mind many painful reflections. The loss of an affectionate friend, who had for so many years been the faithful partner of his cares and labours,

must have been distressing at any time; but in the present case the trial was rendered peculiarly affecting to Moses from the circumstances with which it was attended. He had to accompany his brother, with his son Eleazar, to the top of Mount Hor, where, after divesting Aaron of his pontifical garments, and putting them upon his successor, he was to witness the expiring moments of the venerable high-priest in the sight of all Israel. But the gloom of this solemn ceremony became deepened by the declaration that it was the infliction of judgment upon "Moses and Aaron, because they rebelled against the word of the Lord." Hard, however, as the commandment might seem, we do not read of any murmuring on the part of those who were most concerned in its afflicting terms. Aaron submitted with pious resignation to the Divine will, and Moses, though the separation deprived him of many human comforts and advantages, neither complained of the duty which was laid upon him, nor supplicated for the continuance of so valuable a coadjutor. They knew that death is the common lot of all men, being the inevitable law impressed upon human nature in consequence of the fall. But in the present instance Aaron was called away in full health, and in the presence of the congregation, by virtue of a judicial sentence, for an act which to some might seem venial and inadvertent. Now if ever good men were warranted in praying for the prolongation of life, as the means of enlarging their sphere of usefulness, the intreaty of Aaron to be spared for a little while, might have been justified on the same ground, or at least it would have formed an excuse in the plea of human infirmity. We find that Moses himself implored the Divine mercy and permission to visit the good land beyond Jordan, the goodly mountain, and Lebanon; "but the Lord," said he to the people,

"was wroth with me for your sakes; and would not hear me." Deut. iii. 25, 26.

From this we learn that the death of Aaron in so public a manner, and distinguished with such remarkable forms, was intended for the public instruction, to show the displeasure of the Lord against sin, who will not overlook it even in persons of eminent holiness. It was also an expressive demonstration of the immutable perfection of his word, and the perpetuity of his church and ministry upon earth. But it was significant of somewhat more, which a little consideration of Aaron's typical character will enable us better to understand. He was the elder brother of Moses, who consecrated him, by the Divine command, to the office of high-priest; in allusion to which appointment St. Paul says, "No man taketh this honour unto himself but he that is called of God, as was Aaron; so also Christ glorified not himself to be made a high priest, but He that said unto him, 'Thou art my Son; to-day have I begotten thee.'" Heb. v. 4, 5. The holy oil with which Aaron was consecrated consisted of the richest and most fragrant spices, and this mixture was so copiously poured upon his head that it flowed down over all his garments. Thus the royal Prophet describes the abundant graces of the Messiah, "Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. All thy garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia." Ps. xlv. 7, 8. In the same divine composition the Psalmist, addressing the glorious object of his trust and expectation, says, "Grace is poured into thy lips;" which agrees with what was declared by the Redeemer's precursor, the Baptist, on the banks of the Jordan, "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God, for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him." John, iii. 34. Aaron was clothed with holy vestments, in which

he appeared before the Lord on the solemn day of expiation, to make atonement for his own sins and for those of the people. But in all this he was no more than a figure of "Christ, who being a high-priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood hath he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." Heb. ix. 11, 12. The disrobing of Aaron on account of his offence, was an evident proof that no priest defiled by sin, and under the dominion of death, could satisfy the infinite demands of Divine justice and bring in everlasting righteousness.

In transferring the office to Eleazar before the actual demise of his father, an assurance was given that the church and priesthood should remain till the coming of that better covenant, of which the law was only a shadow. Aaron being now reduced to the level of ordinary men, even before the breath departed from him, was a plain indication that the Levitical institution should be of limited duration; but that the blessings which it figured were to endure for ever. It was no doubt a comfort to Aaron that the sacred office was preserved and continued in the person of his son; and in this translation his departing spirit might be enabled to discern the salvation of God. He who was accustomed to offer legal sacrifices for the sins of others, must now die for his own transgression, and first be stripped of all his ornaments. Thus Christ emptied himself of all his glory, became of no reputation, and submitted to the death of the cross as an atonement for the accumulated sins of all believers. But Aaron was gathered unto his fathers, the mortal vesture crumbled into dust, and the priestly character, which commenced with him, ended with "the bringing in of a better hope; by the which we draw nigh unto God." But

Jesus having offered a perfect sacrifice for sin, and being raised by the power of the eternal Spirit from the state of death, "continueth for ever, having an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Heb. vii. 24, 25.

MARCH THE 'EIGHTH.

THE BRAZEN SERPENT.

Numbers, xxi. 9.—*And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole: and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived.*

THE last miracle wrought by the ministration of Moses was more directly typical of the redemption figured in the deliverance of Israel, than any other incident recorded in the history of that wonderful people after their departure from Egypt. Indeed, without considering it in this light as symbolical of some blessing of an extensive and spiritual import, it will be found difficult to reconcile the means employed for the removal of a terrible evil, with the repeated prohibitions of the law against the formation of graven images.

After defeating one of the kings of Canaan, the Israelites were obliged to change their route, and "to journey from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom." This unexpected alteration of their course when they had just obtained a view of the promised land, attended with circumstances calculated to raise their expectations, threw them into a state of despondence, and revived among them the old spirit of sedition. Having be-

held the fruitful hills of Canaan and its well-watered vallies, the arid desert discouraged them, and they began to complain of the benefits to which they had been long accustomed. The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt, to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread." If they had been suffering from the want of any necessary article of life, the Divine compassion would no doubt have allowed much to the infirmity of human nature; but on the contrary they were continually supplied with the bread of heaven, and water miraculously drawn from the rock followed them in all the variations of their course. Thus supported by an especial providence, they enjoyed uncommon health and strength, so that throughout their long and perilous travels in the wilderness, "their raiment waxed not old upon them, neither did their feet swell for the space of forty years." Deut. viii. 4. Yet these peculiar mercies only served to make this inconsiderate nation dissatisfied with their condition, whenever they contrasted it with the sensualities of Egypt, or the luxuries of which their carnal minds anticipated the speedy enjoyment in Canaan. For this rebellion against the majesty and beneficence of Jehovah, they were now visited with a calamity equally ferriid and appropriate. Fiery serpents came among them in such abundance, that many of the Israelites perished before the great body of the people became sensible of their iniquity. Of what particular kind these serpents were, the sacred history does not enable us to determine; but they are called *seraphim*, or *burners*, which appellation is remarkable, as being the same with that used to designate the flaming spirits, who are the messengers of the Divine will. The bite of these serpents was mortal; and if they were the same with what the prophet

Isaiah terms, "flying fiery serpents," it must have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to elude their attacks. The venom, by exciting the most violent inflammation, occasioned an intolerable thirst, which was unquenchable, and aptly corresponded with the malignity of their sin who were bitten. In this distress the children of Israel were brought to a state of contrition, and for the first time they made an open confession of their wickedness. "We have sinned," said they to Moses, "for we have spoken against the Lord and against thee: pray unto the Lord that he take away the serpents from us." This language shows that the people were truly convinced of their sin, and that they had a proper sense of its enormity, both with respect to the impiety of their conduct towards God and their ingratitude to his servant. To the acknowledgement of their offence, and an admission of the justice with which it was visited, they added an earnest intreaty that Moses would pray to the Lord for them. His intercession was answered by this extraordinary command, "Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it shall live." According to the Divine direction Moses made the representation, which he elevated to such a height as to render it conspicuous through the whole extent of the camp; so that when any person was wounded, "on looking at the serpent of brass he lived."

Such is the history of this visitation, and the remedy, of which an apocryphal writer has given an elegant and evangelical illustration. "They were troubled for a small season, that they might be admonished, having a sign of salvation to put them in remembrance of the commandment of thy law. For he that turned himself towards it was not saved by the thing that he saw, but by thee that art the Saviour of all. They were pricked, that they should

remember thy words, and were quickly saved, that not falling into deep forgetfulness they might be continually mindful of thy goodness. For it was neither herb nor mollifying plaister that restored them to health, but thy word, O Lord, which healeth all things." Wisdom, xvi. 6, 11.

The whole circumstance was indeed a lively picture of the misery of man by sin, and of his salvation through faith in Christ. In the perverseness of Israel, rejecting and despising the Divine goodness, we may perceive the depravity of our nature and its continual disposition to murmur and revolt against the Author of all our mercies. The plague of serpents forcibly represented the dominion of the evil spirit over sinners, and the impossibility of their receiving any cure for the wounds inflicted by his fiery darts, or deliverance from his power by human means. With this view, no doubt, the name of *seraphim* was given to these serpents, as equally denoting the virulence of their poison, and the character of those spiritual destroyers of which they were exact emblems. The fallen angels are still *seraphs*, though, instead of being fervent in obedience to the will of God, they burn with enmity against him, and endeavor on all occasions to infuse the venom of sin into the souls of men. Neither the word nor the rod of Moses could free the Israelites from the calamity with which they were visited, and thus the inefficacy of the law to release from condemnation, and its inability to give eternal life, became manifest. The Divine word, which permitted these serpents to afflict the people, directed a standard to be erected bearing an expressive symbol, towards which every wounded Israelite, by looking in faith, was certain of finding immediate relief. But before this remedy was appointed, the people came to Moses confessing their faults and imploring forgiveness, which was an evidence of their submis-

sion to the righteous dispensations of the Almighty. "By the law is the knowledge of sin;" and though it can neither communicate nor promise pardon to offenders, yet by opening their eyes to a sense of guilt, and making them acquainted with the justice of God, it prepares their minds for the redemption which his mercy hath provided for those who turn to him in repentance and faith. Thus as the Israelites in their distress applied to Moses, against whom they had just before rebelled, so the awakened sinner bows to the law which he has violated, submits to the sentence denounced by it, and acknowledges with all humility, "that the commandment is holy, just, and good." Rom. vii. 12. In this case the judgment that afflicts, and the poison that inflames, are turned to good, by impelling the soul to look for salvation only to Divine grace. The serpent of brass lifted up, was an expressive figure of the crucifixion of Jesus, which, though an ignominious death, became in this instance the sign of triumphant exaltation and conquest, as appeared even to the Roman centurion, when he exclaimed, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Our Lord, in his conversation with Nicodemus, applied to himself, and the offering which he was to make on the cross, the miraculous cure experienced by the Israelites: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." John, iii. 14, 15.

The preceding discourse of the Divine teacher will explain both this declaration and the circumstance to which it refers, by showing the nature of the redemption shadowed in the deliverance of Israel, and purchased by the death of Christ. He had been enforcing the necessity of the new birth, or a complete change of heart, as the indispensable qualification for admission into the kingdom of God; and when Nicodemus expressed his astonishment at the doc-

trine, Jesus directed his ideas back to this history as an illustration of the principle, and an indication of the means by which that new life should be obtained. Man by the fall lost that union which he had with God, and sunk into a state of spiritual darkness and death; from which nothing could raise him but the interposition of the Divine agency in human nature. This was accomplished when the eternal WORD became flesh, and “bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead in sins, might live unto righteousness.” 1 Pet. ii. 24. Faith in this atonement restores the penitent sinner to the Divine favour, and begets a new spring of action in his mind, turning all its affections to the pursuit of holiness, as that good and acceptable way, “without which no man shall see the Lord.” Heb. xii. 14.

Thus, in the language of the same Apostle, “As by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover, the law entered, that the offence might abound: but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” Rom. v. 19—21.

MARCH THE NINTH.

HISTORY OF BALAAM.

Numbers, xvii. 29.—*And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them; but get the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do.*

SUPERIORITY of knowledge is an aggravation of guilt; and when to great illumination in the principles of

religion, a man joins the practical denial of their influence, he seals his condemnation by the decision of his own mind. In the history of Balaam we are presented with a striking instance of this truth, and the whole of his conduct affords much important instruction ; while in the predictions which he uttered we have a confirmation of the sacred records, and an evidence that as the word of prophecy is not of private interpretation, so in the original delivery it was not affected by the will or ingenuity of man.

It has been made a matter of debate whether this celebrated person was a mere soothsayer or a real prophet, an idolater or worshipper of the true God. The question, however, will be drawn into a very narrow compass, and is of easy solution, when we consider that prophecy was not confined to any particular body of people, neither was this divine gift always imparted to righteous persons. Instances are recorded of unworthy men being inspired on some occasions, and the termination of the Jewish theocracy was marked by an extraordinary oracle delivered by the high-priest, as a reason for the condemnation of Jesus, though at the same time the pontiff was not aware that what he urged as a piece of sanguinary advice, was in reality the hidden counsel of God. But in the early ages it is evident many men were favoured by the Divine communications, who did not belong to the lineage of Jacob. The priest of Midian, who supported Moses in his exile, and gave him his daughter in marriage, if not a prophet, had a knowledge of the true God ; and an attention to the history and character of Job will sufficiently show that the spirit of the Lord rested upon this eminent Arabian, as well as upon some of his friends. But though Balaam was clearly a real prophet and priest, who worshipped Jehovah and received the Divine communications, yet he mixed with his religious profession many superstitious observances, and endea-

voured, like too many under a brighter dispensation, to reconcile the love of the world with the fear of God. His reputation, both as a sage and a saint, appears to have been very great; for when the king of Moab invited him to his court, the message closed with these remarkable words: "I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed." That monarch, alarmed at the formidable numbers of Israel now encamped upon his borders, thought that by employing so extraordinary a favourite of Heaven as Balaam, he might succeed in procuring their destruction. Balak was informed of their wonderful deliverance from slavery, and acquainted with their recent victories over the Amorites; he was also sensible of his own inability to contend with such a force; yet he harboured, without reason, the greatest malice against them, and was resolved to attempt their ruin by supernatural means. To obtain this he consulted with his neighbours, the elders of Midian, who were actuated by the same jealous motives; and both states, therefore, joined in sending an embassy to Balaam, who dwelt in Aram or Mesopotamia. It was a common practice among the ancient nations to imprecate the Divine judgments upon their enemies; but it is at least probable that Moab and Midian flattered themselves with being able to counteract the blessing which tradition had recorded as having been promised to the family of Abraham, in the line of Isaac and Jacob. Let this be as it may, Balak and his allies were fully persuaded that Balaam was endowed with a degree of divine power, which at his pleasure he could exercise in bestowing blessings or inflicting vengeance, as well upon nations as individuals. When the messengers came to the house of the Seer with the rewards of divination in their hand, Balaam said, "Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the Lord shall speak unto me." This was an evident indication of his corrupt disposition;

for the proposition which these men made was so repugnant to common justice and the principles of religion, that a honest man would have rejected it with indignation. Instead of this, Balaam presumed to consult the Divine direction upon a case which required no other determination than the ordinary rule of equity. Moab and Midian had not been injured by Israel; neither did the prophet own any allegiance to those powers; how then could he hesitate with respect to the course which he ought to adopt, when invited to execrate a people of whom he had no knowledge? But the presents and honours now offered were too alluring for the evil mind of Balaam to refuse: and, therefore, he was willing to make the trial whether the Divine permission might not be obtained to sanction his journey, though the object of it was to aid the malicious designs of others, and to gratify his own avarice. The next proof of his depravity was in disguising the terms of the prohibition which he received from the Lord, who said to him in the visions of the night, "Thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed." Such was the declaration made to Balaam, and this was his perversion of it the next morning to the princes of Balak: "Get you into your land, for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you." These messengers saw plainly that the prophet was willing enough to do what was required of him, but that some scruple prevented his compliance in the first instance. On returning to Balak they forgot, or wilfully neglected, to report the answer which was given to them, and only said, "Balaam refuseth to come with us." Hearing this, it was natural for Balak to conclude as he did, that the prophet expected more attention and greater honours than those which had been paid him. Another embassy was, therefore, dispatched to Mesopotamia, consisting of personages of more elevated rank, and more in

number than the former; and their message was well adapted to operate upon the sordid mind of Balaam. "Thus saith Balak, the son of Zippor; Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me; for I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come, I pray thee; curse me this people." Balaam was already acquainted with the Divine decree concerning Israel; and he had an explicit direction for his own conduct. Having that information and commandment, it was his duty to dismiss the servants of Balak immediately; stating at the same time the reasons for his refusal to go with them. Instead of this he gave these princes encouragement by saying, "Tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more." Balaam was sensible of this truth, and he could afterwards confess it, that "God is not a man, that he should lye; neither the son of man, that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" This persuasion of the Divine immutability ought to have influenced the prophet's mind in favour of the people whom the Lord had blessed. Yet we clearly see in his reception of the second embassy, a strong desire to oblige the king of Moab; which he could not do without dishonouring God, of whose terrors, however, he stood in such awe, that he would not venture to undertake the journey till he had again consulted the Divine oracle.

Had Balaam faithfully communicated to the princes of Moab the decision of Heaven, as it was really imparted to him, the message probably would not have been repeated, and the confederate states might have avoided the ruin into which they were precipitated by their own jealousy and the dishonesty of the prophet. When the Lord discerned the perverse malignity of Balaam which led him to conceal the

truth from a desire to oblige Balak, he at length suffered the Seer to follow his own inclination, and to accompany the messengers. Balaam had now so far obtained his wish as to be free from any express prohibition to visit Moab. All restraint was taken off from his will in this respect, though he well knew that he possessed no power to utter blessings or curses, which could be ratified in heaven and be confirmed by the event. The very terms in which the interdiction was taken off, might have convinced him, if filthy lucre had not blinded his understanding and corrupted his heart, that the issue of his enterprise would be unfavourable to his employers, and disgraceful to himself. “And God came to Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them; but YET THE WORD WHICH I SHALL SAY UNTO THEE, THAT SHALT THOU DO.”

MARCH THE TENTH.

HISTORY OF BALAAM.

Numbers, xvii. 38.—*And Balaam said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say any thing? The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.*

So eager was Balaam to earn the wages of unrighteousness, that he rose up in the morning, saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. In this it may be said, that he did no more than what he was permitted, and even directed to do, by the word of the Lord. But let us attend to the terms of the grant, and to the conduct of Balaam; in which case we shall find that even in this stage of the busi-

ness he acted beyond, and consequently violated, the instructions which he had received. "God said to Balaam, If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them;" now, concise as the history is, it appears plain from this part of the narration, that the prophet did not wait for the solicitation of the princes of Moab, as he was commanded, but of his own accord he arose and made preparations for his journey with an alacrity which betrayed the malignant joy of his heart. Instead of accompanying the servants of Balak with the cautious dignity and indifference which, on any occasion, would have become the prophetic character, Balaam rose early and set out on the journey as one who was glad to be released from the restraint which had been laid upon him. He seems to have considered the permission to go with the second body of messengers as almost in the light of a promise that the prayer of Balak should be fulfilled, and his own covetous prospects realized. Filled with these ideas he was more alert to proceed for Moab, than the princes were to call him; and thus by his forwardness he gave them an assurance that the object of their mission was completely answered. This would naturally induce the ambassadors to send off the intelligence to their master that the prophet, so far from resisting his invitation or opposing his wishes, was already on the road: and that he appeared very solicitous to serve him, by his being prepared to go with them on their second interview. That some such information was transmitted to Balak, is clear from the circumstance of his going out to meet the prophet on the borders of his dominions. An attention to these apparently trivial points of the history, will serve to elucidate those parts which have hitherto been regarded as matters of great perplexity and obscurity.

It is said that "God's anger was kindled against Balaam because he went; and the angel of the Lord

stood in the way for an adversary against him." Here the supposed difficulty arises from the leave which the prophet obtained to go with the princes of Moab; but, as we have seen, he acted contrary to the limitations of that indulgence. Balaam, instead of following the ambassadors, as he was ordered, presumed to lead the way, attended by his servants; and thus he fully signified his intention to comply with the desires of Balak, unless he should be prevented by a superior power. Well, therefore, might the anger of the Lord be kindled against the rebellious prophet for entertaining such views, and for encouraging by his conduct Moab and Midian in their evil designs upon Israel. It was not his going, but the manner of it, and the spirit by which he was moved, that drew upon him the Divine displeasure; and the interposition of the angel to impede his progress. Balaam well knew that the sentence of Heaven could not be reversed by man; and that no prophet was able to deliver any prediction of his own mind. Yet he so interpreted the permission which had been granted him, as if it contained a decision in favour of those who had engaged his services. This was what the Apostle justly styles "the madness of the prophet;" but the infatuation of his judgment arose from the depravity of his heart; and he plunged into the foulest errors, by bending his conscience to the views of worldly interest. To confound his evil imagination, and to expose his perverseness in the presence of those who were misled by the zeal which he manifested, a prodigy occurred in the way which could not fail to astonish and disappoint the princes of Moab, while it mortified the pride and expectations of the prophet. In judging of miracles, regard must be had to the times and places in which they happened, and the character of the people for whose instruction or conviction they were performed. When the rod of Aaron swallowed up, in the presence of

Pharaoh, the wands of his magicians, an evident sign was given which spoke more forcibly than any verbal prediction could well do, that the cause of Israel should triumph in the confusion of Egypt. So in the present case, when the ass on which Balaam rode became the instrument of rebuking his folly and perverseness, a complete demonstration was afforded, that, notwithstanding all the parade exhibited by the prophet and his admirers, the schemes formed against the devoted people should turn against their enemies. Balaam was a man of great renown among the eastern nations, and therefore the progress of such a personage upon an enterprize which was considered as of general concern, could not but attract much observation, while the distinction with which he was treated, tended to swell his own vanity and to make him thirst for greater honours. On these accounts then, the means adopted to punish Balaam, and dishearten those who placed an implicit trust in his knowledge and power, will be found admirably suited to all the circumstances of this extraordinary case. Here was an oracle of great wisdom and reputed sanctity, at the head of a numerous train of nobles and princes, proceeding in the wickedness of his heart, with an intention to denounce such an imprecation against the Israelites as would bring upon them the combined force of all the neighbouring states. It is true, the Divine Protector of his people could as easily have delivered them from the attacks of their foes, as defeat in the beginning the designs formed for their ruin. But the Divine glory was more powerfully manifested in over-ruling the machinations of Moab and Midian, than could have been done by the destruction of their armies; since the predictions so publicly delivered by one employed to curse Israel, would necessarily be spread over all the East, and thereby become a permanent testimony in favour of that people. The miracle which corrected Balaam

was witnessed, not only by his own servants, but by the ambassadors ; and the effect it produced appears from the declaration of the prophet when he met the king of Moab ; “ Lo, I am come unto thee ; have I now any power at all to say any thing ? The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.” Balaam knew that the same Power which could open the mouth of the ass, held an absolute command over his own ; and though he departed from his own country in the vain hope of gaining abundant wealth and high distinction at the court of Balak, the occurrence on the journey completely overthrew all his flattering expectations. The humiliating situation in which he was placed when an animal, not remarkable for its sagacity, became his monitor, must have operated very strongly upon his own mind, as well as upon the sentiments of those who accompanied him. Such an uncommon adventure could not be concealed, though the special purposes it was intended to answer, were wholly hidden from those who beheld the wonderful scene. They might hear the ass, and observe the conduct of the prophet ; but with the presence of the angel, his remonstrance and charge, they were unacquainted : thus much, however, the most simple judgment would be able to conclude, that he who was so inferior to the beast which he rode, had no authority to bless or curse nations. That Balak was unaffected by a miracle, of which he could not fail to be informed, is easy to be accounted for, from the superstition of his character, which would lead him to consider the man so distinguished by prodigies as fully qualified to answer his vengeful purposes. Balaam himself seems to have acted with so much sincerity, to which however he was compelled by his fears, as to acknowledge that he had no power to say any thing except as he should be moved by the Divine agency.

Notwithstanding this confession, the evil inclinations of these men hurried them into measures which covered them with disgrace, and served to spread abroad the glory of Israel. By an over-ruling providence the jealousy of Balak, and the avarice of Balaam, became instrumental in promulgating through the regions of the East the gracious designs of God towards his chosen people, the subjugation of their enemies, and the final establishment of the Messiah's kingdom. Thus was exemplified the strong language of Zophar: "The Almighty knoweth vain men: he seeth wickedness also; will he not then consider it? For vain man would be wise; though man be born like a wild ass's colt." Job, xi. 11, 12.

MARCH THE ELEVENTH.

BALAAM'S WISH.

Numbers, xviii. 10.—*Let me die the death of the righteous; and let my last end be like his.*

HOWEVER abandoned a man may be in his life, he would willingly enjoy the comforts and assurance of religion at his death. This is the triumph of truth and righteousness when vice can no more deceive the mind, nor the world, with its allurements, any longer charm the imagination. There are moments also in the career of pleasure, and the pursuit of riches, when the gay and the covetous, the extravagant and ambitious, regard virtue with reverence, and sigh inwardly, at least, for that content which it affords. But it is the prospect of futurity that renders holiness peculiarly desirable even in the estimation of those persons who are most intent upon earthly enjoyments, and who act as if the present life constituted the whole existence of man in the

capacity of a conscious being. Too many, indeed, while the vanities of time engage their affections, indulge the hope that irregularity in the discharge of the moral duties, and negligence in religious improvement, will be considered as venial errors, and pardonable failings, by Him whose justice is strict, but whose mercy is infinite.

The history of Balaam is a striking instance of this self-delusion ; for at the very time when he was anxious to obtain temporal honours and emoluments at the expense of his conscience, he could presume to call the Lord his God ; and though he did all that lay in his power to further the evil designs of Moab and Midian against Israel, the desire of his soul was to be gathered with the righteous at last. The sight of the chosen people spread peaceably abroad in the valley, and a sense of the Divine Majesty which protected them, operated so strongly upon the feelings of the prophet, that even the presence of Balak could not repress the impassioned utterance of them. In the prophecy which he had just before delivered, Balaam, under the guidance of the Spirit, drew an exact picture of the future establishment and prosperity of Israel, though there was then nothing in the condition of these wandering tribes that could have warranted such an expectation or conjecture. But the most remarkable part of this prediction is the declaration that " Israel should dwell alone, and not be numbered among the nations ;" which circumstance was fully verified in the separation of this people from all the other families of the earth. While the attention of Balaam was fixed upon the camp of Israel, and in contemplating the future history of this infant society, his mind was carried back to a consideration of their great progenitor, concerning whom and his lineage he broke forth in this lofty strain of admiration : " Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the

fourth part of Israel :” Having thus described the glory and extent of his posterity, to whom Jehovah had said, “ that his seed should be as the dust of the earth” (Gen. xxviii, 14), Balaam was left to his own thoughts, when, as it were, melted under the impression of the Divine communication, he exclaimed, “ Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end (or rather, let my residue and posterity) be like his.” It is plain from the language of this prayer, and the terms of the preceding prophecy, that Balaam had in his thoughts the venerable founder of Israel, and the blessings which in his last moments the holy patriarch bequeathed to his children.

The public declaration of Balaam comprehended these particulars; the belief of a future state, an acknowledgement that righteousness only could procure the Divine blessing, and an attestation to the truth of the promise originally made to Abraham, confirmed in Isaac, and enlarged to Jacob and his family. Thus did Balaam become a voluntary witness to the great truths of revealed religion, by his free confession of their efficacious influence and eternal advantage; while in his prophetic quality he was compelled to deliver a series of predictions which ratified and explained those of dying Jacob; and in their accomplishment have given demonstrative evidence in support of the Mosaic history. The very character and fate of Balaam will be found to increase the value of his testimony. Like Judas, who vindicated the innocence of Jesus, whom he betrayed, this celebrated seer, when employed in the service of persecutors and idolaters, proclaimed aloud the righteousness of Jacob, expressed his own desire to be numbered with the people of God, and made more fully known the promise of that Saviour who should “ arise as a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of his people Israel.” Luke, ii. 32.

The incident, upon which our attention has been fixed, teaches us that good wishes and pious resolutions, so far from being any extenuation for erroneous conduct, will only serve to aggravate every offence ; since they indicate a mind well informed upon the nature and extent of religious duty. Balaam could make mention of divine things ; he also professed to believe and worship the true God, in whose name he delivered several glorious prophecies, and while surrounded by the princes of Moab and Midian he ventured to utter this exalted sentiment : " Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." Yet with all this illumination of his understanding and external appearance of sanctity, his heart was the seat of wickedness ; so that an Apostle could not more fitly describe the character and practices of certain deceivers who troubled the church in his day, than by calling them the followers of Balaam, the son of Bosor. In what manner these apostates corresponded to their prototype, is thus forcibly expressed : " They are wells without water ; clouds that are carried with a tempest, to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever."

The fate of Balaam, who justly fell the victim of his own abominable counsels, aptly figured the awful doom of all who, like him, sacrifice the principles of truth and virtue, to error and vice. " If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." 2 Peter, ii. 17—21.

MARCH THE TWELFTH.

BALAAM'S PROPHECY.

Numbers, xxiv. 17.—*I shall see him, but not now ; I shall behold him, but not nigh : there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.*

THREE times did Balak endeavour to bring down the Divine malediction upon Israel, by the agency of Balaam, who was ready enough to comply with his wishes ; but on every occasion a superior power controlled his will, and impelled him to pronounce blessings instead of execrations. His predictions were an illustration of the promise given to Abraham, and corresponded to the explicit declarations and sublime imagery of the other great patriarchs. There is, for instance, a remarkable coincidence between his description of the prosperity of Israel, and the benediction pronounced by Isaac upon his younger son.

This is the picture exhibited to the view of Balaam, and which even in the literal sense was fulfilled in the temporal felicity of the chosen people. “ How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel ! As the valleys are they spread forth ; as gardens by the river's side ; as the trees of lign-aloes, which the Lord hath planted ; and as cedar-trees beside the waters. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters ; and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brought him forth out of Egypt ; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn : he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows. He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion ; who shall stir him up ? Blessed

is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee." The language in which the blessing was conveyed to Jacob, expressed with equal force the glorious establishment of his posterity, and their exaltation over all opposition. "God give thee of the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine. Let people serve thee; and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee." The revelations of Jacob himself, on his death-bed, will further explain the prophecies of Balaam. Temporal power and fertile possessions were bequeathed by the patriarch to all his sons, but the spiritual blessing could not be divided, and therefore this was decreed to be the portion of one in particular. "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise; thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." All these predictions were comprehended in those proclaimed from the heights of Moab, though the eastern seer amplified them under the guidance of the Spirit, not only in the variety of description, but in expressing by name the nations which should yield to the dominion of Israel. He was also enabled to discern that splendid Power, who should in the fullness of time arise on the world with healing in his beams; the great object of expectation to the righteous before the flood, and of special promise to Abraham and his faithful seed. So early as the fall, man was assured of a deliverer who should destroy the dominion of the serpent; and

this was the blessing so much spoken of in the sacred history as the distinction of Israel, and that which brought upon them the animosity of other nations. Corrupt as their ideas were of this blessing, there was enough in the traditionary information which they had of it, to excite the envy of Moab and Midian against the posterity of Jacob. The first of these people were the children of Lot, and the latter derived their origin from Abraham—circumstances which would naturally incline them to look with a malignant eye upon the progeny of Jacob. Now Balaam himself was descended from the father of the faithful; and this, with his high character as a prophet, appeared to render him the fittest person to answer the malevolent purposes of Moab and Midian. But as the cunning and malicious commonly deceive themselves, and frustrate their own schemes, so was it in the present case with Balaam and his admirers. Instead of changing the decree, or setting aside the ancient presages in favour of Israel, which no doubt were very generally known at that time, the prophet was obliged to confirm and enlarge them, with particular denunciations against their enemies. Balaam could perceive what Balak and his princes had no conception of, the presence of the Divine glory in the camp of Israel. “The Lord his God is with him,” said the astonished seer, “and the shout of a king is among them.” He knew that this singular people were under the immediate protection and guidance of the eternal Word, who reigned in the midst of them as their God and King. But the prophet had the prospect of a more extensive polity than the wonderful theocracy immediately before him; and by the power of the Spirit he saw, through distant ages, the Mighty One ascending his holy hill of Zion, and sending forth the perfect law of righteousness, even though “the kings of the earth confederated

themselves, and the rulers took counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed." Ps. ii. 2, 6.

The glory of this mighty potentate is thus described in the supplementary prophecy of Balaam : " The man whose eyes are open hath said : He hath said which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High, which saw the vision of the ALMIGHTY, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open : I shall see HIM, but not now ; I shall behold HIM, but not nigh ; there shall come a STAR out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy (or rather reduce) all the children of Sheth." Here it is evident from the construction of the language, that God, Most High and Omnipotent, is the object of the prophet's contemplation, and expressed by him under the symbols of a Star and Sceptre. Balaam had held repeated communications with the DIVINE WORD : he knew his will, and he witnessed his personal reign over Israel : the vision, therefore, which he now had of the ALMIGHTY, was a manifestation of the same glorious person under another dispensation ; in the latter days. Great as his present government was in the support and direction of Israel, it bore no comparison to that wide domain which he should possess over the children of men, after triumphing over all his adversaries. They who apply this prophecy to the reign and achievements of David, must explain in what sense Balaam saw that monarch when so many generations elapsed between them. By understanding the whole of the Messiah, this remarkable prophecy harmonizes with the preceding predictions, and displays with astonishing force and elegance the nature of that blessing which Balak and his allies were so anxious to wrest from Israel. In the figurative language of ancient prophecy the star was emblematic of divinity, as the sceptre was of a righteous and an extensive dominion.

The union of the images, in this place, was evidently intended to express the superlative dignity of that Being who should arise in the family of Israel, and by the cheering influence of his doctrine illumine the dark corners of the earth. This prediction, indeed, will be found to have the same object in view with that of Isaiah: "In mercy shall the throne be established; and HE shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking judgment, and hastening righteousness." Isa. xvi. 5.

Both oracles agree in representing the dominion of this mighty potentate as extending over various nations, and to a degree never possessed by any temporal sovereign after the establishment of monarchy in Israel. What Balaam delivered in relation to the Moabites, though apparently the denunciation of judgment, may be considered truly as predictive of mercy, in the same sense with the declaration concerning the children of Sheth. Neither of these people were to be destroyed or extirpated, but only reduced to obedience, and made the subjects of a righteous king. As the light of this Star was to guide men from the darkness of prejudice and error, into the way of truth; so the Sceptre was to unite them into one profession, the acknowledgement of the same Divine authority, and the exercise of mutual love and kindness, as members of the same family. To this state the evangelical prophet alludes when he describes the daughter of Zion making this request: "Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab; be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler: for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land." These obscure sentences of prophecy can be explained by no other circumstance in history, than the original promulgation of the Gospel, when the light issuing from Judea spread gradually over all the horizon; and when its persecuted votaries found a refuge from the

malice of their countrymen among the Gentiles, who gladly received what the others rejected. Thus did the Star literally come out of Jacob, and run its glorious course over various regions; while the Sceptre of truth increased mightily and prevailed; and this will continue to be the case so long as the sun and moon endure, for "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." Philip. ii. 10, 11.

Thus, according to the Apostle, the authority of Messiah is not only joyfully submitted to in heaven and upon earth, but also acknowledged in the world of spirits to which he descended, and where he dwelt, during the interval between his death and resurrection. Then the majesty of the Saviour making an open display of triumph over "Death, and him that had the power of it," was hailed by the multitudes of redeemed nations, while his glorious entry into his kingdom covered the powers of darkness with confusion, and the souls of apostates with agony and remorse. Then did Balaam, of whom charity has nothing to hope, experience the accomplishment of the prophecy which he uttered without knowing its real import; "I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh." So truly was the awful declaration of the blessed Jesus exemplified in the conduct and fate of one, who, like Judas, bore testimony to the truth which he betrayed, and sinned against Divine grace with his eyes open. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matt. vii. 22, 23.

MARCH THE THIRTEENTH.

THE ZEAL OF PHINEHAS.

Numbers, xxv. 12.—*Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace.*

WHEN Balaam found that he could not oblige his employers as a prophet, he adopted the wicked expedient of serving them in the character of a politician. Knowing that the surest way to effect the ruin of a state was by corrupting its manners and principles, he endeavoured to make his peace with the king of Moab, by advising him to try the influence of female allurements in bringing the Israelites over to idolatry. That such counsel should be given by one who had a reputation for wisdom and sanctity, sufficiently indicates the abandoned character of those nations from whom the Almighty was so careful to separate his people. The daughters of Moab, instead of revolting from the abominable proposal with the indignation of insulted virtue, were eager to advance the design, as being calculated to serve their country and to immortalize themselves. But little ought their conduct to excite surprise, when we consider that the influence of the court, the doctrines of the sage, and the practices of their religion, all concurred to inflame the passions and debauch the morals. The education of these damsels must have been vicious in the extreme, when the government could so easily avail itself of their attractions to promote the worst of purposes. The sequel of the story plainly shows that the females distinguished in this infamous business, were not those of ordinary station, but the daughters of the principal houses in Moab and Midian. And thus it ever has been in the degeneracy of states, which beginning with the higher ranks, in what perhaps may be called refined taste and re-

gulated indulgence, swells and descends in turbid violence through the various channels of gradation, till all distinction is lost, and nothing appears but one mass of pollution, the destruction of which becomes an act of mercy to the rest of mankind. Well, therefore, might the ruler of Israel make a terrible example of those chiefs who fell into the snare laid by Balaam, and who, like him, having suffered their integrity to be perverted, were easily persuaded to renounce their God also, by assisting in the worship of Baal Peor. This was an act of summary justice, rendered necessary by the circumstances of the people, since their intermixture with the Moabites and Midianites, if suffered to continue, would have destroyed their religion and independence. This indeed was the scheme as originally planned in the crafty mind of Balaam; and certainly none could have been more cunningly devised, even by infernal malice, to ruin a society, the members of which had little knowledge of the world, and who were ready on every occasion to quarrel with their own peculiar institutions. How successful the fascinating arts of female seduction were upon the Israelites, may be gathered from the number that perished on this occasion, and the particular circumstance which produced a cessation of the judgment. Great indeed must have been the apostasy, when at the very height of the plague which the Lord sent among the people, one of their princes could have the temerity to brave the Divine vengeance, by an open act of wickedness. The command was general, to slay all who had been guilty of this crime; and yet while the victims of justice lay scattered around, and the congregation on that account were weeping before the tabernacle, Zimri, the head of a considerable family in the tribe of Simeon, brought a woman of Midian publicly to his brethren, and in the face of the people conducted her into his tent.

The sin of this man became aggravated by the impudent manner in which it was committed; and its enmity was heightened by the rank of the offender, as one of the most considerable princes in a powerful tribe. It is evident from the narrative, that the deed was purposely exhibited to throw ridicule upon the congregation, and in defiance of the sovereign authority. If Zimri had not been actuated by this impious and rebellious spirit, he would hardly have ventured to show openly his disobedience of the laws, and utter disregard of all decorum. He seems indeed to have relied upon the support of his brethren, by introducing the adulteress to them without receiving, for any thing that appears, either correction or reproof from the chiefs of his family. Under all these circumstances the zeal of Phinehas in slaying both the criminals, would have entitled him to perpetual esteem and reverence, even though it had not been recorded with approbation, and the promise of the Divine blessing. Enough appears to prove that the act resulted from the most exalted motives, and that in the performance of his duty Phinehas ran the risk of encountering no small danger from the resentment of a formidable house. Our admiration of his conduct will be farther increased by considering that he was of an age when the blandishments of vice are apt to kindle another flame than that of religious fervour; but this young man, instead of being contaminated by the lascivious spectacle, or awed by the dignity and power of the offenders, immediately rose up, and asserted the cause of virtue in the face of the congregation. That which struck the elders with astonishment, and seems to have confounded even the righteous Moses, fired the soul of Phinehas with holy transport; so that unsupported, except by his own integrity, he vindicated the honour of God, and made an atonement for the sins of the people. To this history the Apostle referred the Corinthian con-

verts, in his exhortation against idolatry and those licentious practices by which it was uniformly distinguished. "Neither," says he, in allusion to the Israelites, "be ye idolaters, as were some of them: as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand." 1 Cor. x. 7, 8. No vice is so pregnant with mischief as lust, which makes a man the slave of his passions, perverts in him all sense of moral duty, and by brutalizing his ideas, renders him, at length, insensible to the true dignity of his nature as an immortal being. Young persons, therefore, will do well to shun every connexion, which may have the slightest tendency to bring them familiar with impurity: for the beginnings of evil are so seductive as even to deceive those who would start with horror at vice in its real magnitude, and undisguised deformity. In the firmness and intrepidity of Phinehas they are instructed what course to pursue when surrounded by temptations, which, under various forms, and recommended by many examples, strive for the mastery of their affections. Faith only, in such cases, can shield the heart from the fiery darts of the wicked one; and if this be laid aside, the senses will soon be taken in captivity by the enemy of souls, who knows how to make use of them for securing the possession which he has obtained.

If then we would enjoy here that peace which passeth all understanding, and receive at last the crown of glory which fadeth not away, let us keep in our mind the directions of the beloved disciple: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the

world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doth the will of God, abideth for ever." 1 John, ii. 15—17.

MARCH THE FOURTEENTH.

THE ELECTION OF ISRAEL.

Deuteronomy, vii. 6.—*The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.*

THAT the Creator of the universe, who showers the blessings of his providence upon the various tribes of mankind, with an impartial hand, according to their respective conditions and situations, should have condescended to call one particular family by the endearing name of HIS PEOPLE, seems at first sent a very unequal dispensation. But if it shall appear that this selection, so far from being partial, had a universal object; and that even the peculiar institutes communicated to this people were directed to the same end, the wisdom and equity of the appointment can no longer be called in question. The Hebrew legislator, himself, took care to caution the Israelites against indulging the notion that their righteousness had occasioned this separation between them and other nations. To repress so delusive a conceit, he reminded them of their numerous rebellions, and he repeated the character so often given of them, that they were "a stiff-necked and stubborn generation." Notwithstanding this the Almighty, remembering his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, established them as his inheritance, and became in a particular sense their God, "that they might be made high above all nations, in praise, and in name, and

in honour." To them were imparted statutes and ordinances specially adapted to a people under the Divine government, and who were to be kept completely distinct from the other descendants of Adam. A distinction so singular, and marked by observances which were evidently not of human device, must have had some grand and secret intention in the Divine mind. Of this Moses apprized the Israelites, after having recapitulated their history, and explained and enforced the duty of obedience to the particular code of which he was the minister from the Almighty to them : "The secret," said he, "belongs to the Lord our God; but the things which are revealed, unto us, and to our children, for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."

This SECRET was no other than the great mystery of redemption, of which the law in its different parts was but the shadow or figure, and the peculiar organization of the family of Israel, the prescribed channel of conveyance : so that the promise itself might not only be kept continually alive, but the certainty of its accomplishment be exactly determined in the coming of Him who should "break down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile; and having abolished in his flesh the enmity or separation of ordinances, reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross." Ephes. ii. 15, 16. Now it is obvious that unless some particular community had been early set apart with an express revelation, and positive institutions, for the preservation of the genuine record of man's fall, and the prediction of his restoration to life and happiness, these most important truths, if they did not sink into utter oblivion, would have been so perverted as to produce no concern for the loss of the Divine favour, nor any desire of its recovery. Of the primeval world, and the creation of man, we should have known little except through the vitiated medium

of traditionary information; and with the origin of evil our acquaintance would have been still less; consequently to the moral law, in its great branches, we must have remained entire strangers. Minds so clouded with ignorance could never have discovered by any force of natural reasoning the certainty of a future state, if indeed they had been able to ascend, through a long and perplexed series of causes, to the idea of an infinitely good, wise, and powerful Being, the creator and governor of the universe. The call of Abraham, therefore, and the separation of his family from the rest of the world, must be considered as an act of universal interest, since it kept entire and unadulterated the history of the Divine operations in nature and grace, without which record, man would have speculated continually in a round of labour and uncertainty, upon the extent of his duty, and the great ends of his being. But now when we see the covenant of redemption treasured up with the memorial of our original condition, the appointment, which once appeared partial and obscure, bears the broad stamp of infinite intelligence; and Divine love shines out through all the types and ordinances of the law, leading us by a steady and cheering light "to the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

To this great central object every part of the Mosaic institute had a direct bearing; and though the obligation of the ceremonial law has long ceased, yet the whole of that ritual stands in the sacred code as a perpetual and illustrious testimony to his mission and divinity, who having fulfilled all righteousness hath "by one offering perfected for ever those who are sanctified by his Spirit." Heb. x. 14. The distinction between Israel and other nations is thus forcibly represented by an Apostle who was deeply learned in the spiritual meaning of the history and law of this people; "What advantage then hath the Jew? or

what profit is there in circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God." Rom. iii. 1, 2. But Israel was not merely the depository of the Divine ordinances and decrees; the whole constitution of this miraculous theocracy prefigured that spiritual body of which Christ is the head and the Saviour, "sanctifying and cleansing it with the washing of water by the Word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish." Ephes. v. 26, 27. The language, therefore, of Moses to the people under his charge, may with equal propriety and little variation be addressed to all the members of the community which "Christ hath redeemed by his blood."—"The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people (for ye were the fewest of all people), but because the Lord loved you; and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Know, therefore, that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, who keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations." Deut. vii. 7—9. As the children of Israel were safely kept in the house of bondage, and finally delivered from thence by a miraculous display of power, pursuant to the engagement made with their fathers; so are we rescued from the slavery of sin and death, only by virtue of the eternal covenant entered into in heaven, and ratified on earth, when the promise was given at the fall, "the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." The Israelites passed through many years of probation for the land of inheritance, by several tedious marches in the

wilderness; and in like manner the church waited long for her redemption, under various dispensations, till the joyful sound was heard: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Isa. xl. 3.

MARCH THE FIFTEENTH.

THE DOOM OF CANAAN.

Deuteronomy, ix. 4.—*Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord doth drive them out from before thee.*

THERE is hardly any circumstance in the sacred history which has been so much the subject of speculation as the curse denounced against Canaan; nor one that has produced more intemperate censure than the execution of that judgment upon his posterity. Both these points are so intimately connected, that the explication of the one will be a satisfactory vindication of the other; and thus while the justice of God is made apparent in the transactions performed under his authority, his wisdom and goodness will be seen in the decree which was proclaimed so many ages before the event took place. What the offence of Canaan was that gave occasion for the express mention of his name in the prophecy of Noah, has afforded matter of ingenious conjecture to the critics, and of invention to the rabbins. But in truth, as the Scripture says nothing of his sin, we may safely suppose him altogether innocent of any participation in that of Ham. The question is not affected by the personal character of Canaan, but by that of his family,

and the particular nature of the crime committed by his father. Now, according to the history, Ham was guilty of a most atrocious deed, combining rebellion with impiety, to punish which, the Divine Spirit, by the mouth of Noah, immediately communicated a revelation of what would happen to his descendants. Blessing and cursing, in the prophetic style, must not be always understood as denoting the special interposition of the Almighty in the affairs of men, by way of favour or execration; but only as describing in the strongest language the peculiar circumstances of their temporal condition. When, therefore, we read that Canaan was declared accursed by his grandfather, we should not take it as an imprecation of vengeance, but simply as a prediction of the sin and misery which would distinguish that branch of the patriarchal line. As Ham in an unnatural manner exposed the weakness of his father, and this is representing his offence in terms beneath the real magnitude of it, therefore did Noah, by inspiration, lift up the veil of futurity, and open to his mortified view the abominations which would bring down the wrath of God upon his posterity. But Canaan himself was not hereby rendered an object of hatred to his brethren, by being stigmatized with any particular odium; neither could he be materially affected by the knowledge of what was to happen so many centuries after his death. Upon the mind of Ham the denunciation seems to have made little impression; for the early progress of idolatry among his children, can scarcely be ascribed to any other cause than his confirmed apostasy and evil example. To what a height of wickedness the progeny of his youngest son attained in the time of Abraham, may be learnt from the catastrophe of Sodom, with the other cities of the plain; and yet we are told that "the iniquity of the Canaanites was not even then full." Gen. xv. 16. Such indeed was the forbearance of Heaven; that the

corruptions of these people were suffered to accumulate above four hundred years after this awful display of the Divine vengeance. But neither that stroke of justice, nor the perfect pattern of virtue exhibited in the life of Abraham, produced any reformation in this race, who were guilty of enormities so vile, that in the strong language of Scripture "the very land itself vomited out her inhabitants." Lev. xviii. 25.

During all that period these nations were not left without a witness to the truth, and admonitions to repentance : for besides the prophecies of Noah and the standing memorial of Sodom, they were familiar with the history of the righteous patriarchs, and had a thorough knowledge of what God had wrought for his people in Egypt and the wilderness. The remarkable manner in which the children of Israel were conducted for the space of forty years, their singular polity, extraordinary population, and insulated condition, could not fail to create equal jealousy and alarm in the princes of Canaan, as in those of Moab and Midian. It was impossible that the character and achievements of this migratory nation could be seen without exciting considerable attention and inquiry ; if therefore the Canaanites were less informed than their neighbours on the subject of the blessing to which the seed of Jacob laid claim, they must have been as universally stupid as they were incorrigibly wicked. But in truth they were not ignorant of what this wonderful apparatus portended, and the certain ruin that must inevitably fall upon those who should attempt to resist its power. The particulars of the commission given to Moses were known to them ; and as this contained the explicit promise to bring Israel into the land flowing with milk and honey, of which they were in possession, no doubt could be entertained of the object this people had in view after gaining their liberty and becoming an independent

state. The time, therefore, taken up in the deliverance and organization of Israel, must be considered as an indulgence to the nations of Canaan; and all the mighty acts which occurred during that space, as so many calls to them for repentance and submission to the God of truth and holiness, from whom they and their ancestors had so long revolted.

Though the prediction delivered by Noah declared the offspring of Ham, in that branch, accused, it did not lay them under an absolute decree of reprobation. The Canaanites were not only left free to choose either good or evil; but they enjoyed many great advantages and special privileges, which, properly improved, would have rendered them a blessing upon earth, instead of being what they became, an execrable nuisance. Even Sodom and Gomorrah were not suffered to fall without warning; and when these abominable places became ripe for destruction, their "overthrow was made an example unto those that after should live ungodly." 2 Pet. ii. 6. But the terrors of the Lord were as ineffectual as his abundant mercies; for the cruelties and impurities of the Canaanites were without parallel in the days of Moses, as appears from that part of his law which mentions crimes so revolting to human feeling that the mind pauses with wonder at the reason for enacting statutes against them. It is evident then from a full and impartial view of the case, that these people were treated with a tenderness and long suffering, which aggravated their iniquity, and rendered the judgment that was inflicted upon them an act of strict justice. Providence in the choice of means for the accomplishment of its purposes, is not to be limited by our preceptions of what is right; nor in the application of them to be regulated by man's wisdom. When the Israelites were chosen to punish the wickedness of Canaan, they could be regarded in no other light than as instruments in the hands of the

Almighty, to perform what he had threatened so many ages before : and his equity will be seen as much in this mode of executing his decrees, as in sending down a shower of fire from heaven. The Lord of the universe took the children of Jacob under his own immediate government ; and this was made apparent to all the nations around them, by " his wonders in the field of Zoan ;" his subjects, therefore, were no less bound to fulfill the commands which he gave them, to subdue Canaan, than the destroying angel was to smite the " first-born of Egypt, the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham." Ps. lxxviii. 51. Wickedness was the curse of the Canaanites, and this brought upon them the visitation of the Divine vengeance in the persons of those who were expressly authorized to punish their crimes. But Israel was not, therefore, righteous, because the God of holiness made a covenant with Abraham, that " his seed should possess the gate of his enemies." Gen. xxii. 17.

The moral character of this people was certainly far more pure than that of the nations whose country was allotted to them by a Divine grant ; but still in many points they fell greatly short of that virtue which by their many opportunities of improvement, and extraordinary means of instruction, they ought to have acquired. So far, indeed, were the Israelites from having any righteousness that could entitle them to the Divine favour, that Moses truly described them as being a rebellious and stiff-necked people. They were called, it is true, to be the depositaries of God's word, and the ministers of his will ; but neither the one nor the other was affected by their particular character ; on the contrary, the obstinacy generally displayed by them, and their continual inclination to idolatry, must be considered as a proof of the divine origin of their religion. Had the institutions which distinguished this peculiar commonwealth been of hu-

man device, they would have corresponded with the national disposition, and been assimilated to those practices which the people were so prone to imitate.

Now it is most certain that the spirit of the Israelites, from the beginning to the termination of their polity, was remarkably refractory, and opposed to the Divine institution established for their government. They also abused the blessings which the Almighty bestowed upon them, by falling into many of the evil principles and corrupt practices of their predecessors in Canaan. This degeneracy was indeed predicted, and the dispersion of the people in consequence of it, threatened by the word of Moses in language so descriptive of their present condition, that the serious mind, on comparing the event with the prophecy, is disposed to adopt the exclamation of the Apostle: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Rom. xi. 33.

MARCH THE SIXTEENTH.

THE LAW OF CHARITY.

Deuteronomy, xv. 11.—*For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy in thy land.*

THEY who presume to charge revealed religion with being unfriendly to the social affections, and to that enlarged benevolence which ought to be exercised in acts of charity towards all mankind, betray as much ignorance as malice. Even the Mosaic institutes abound with more liberal sentiments and beneficent provisions than all the volumes of phi-

losophy, antient or modern; and though the whole of this system has been represented by superficial sceptics as a combination of superstition and intolerance, it exhibits the soundest principles of legislation, and the most tender concern for the private comforts of men. Nay more than this, it contains what will not be found in the regulations of human policy, strong and positive injunctions for hospitality to strangers, bounty to the poor, and generosity to enemies. The law of charity is here laid in the deep foundation of that distinction which is essential to the strength of all society. Contrary to the specious, but dangerous notion, which holds out an equality of condition as the inherent right of man, the Author of his being has decreed the necessity of high and low, rich and poor, in every community, for the general good. While the chosen people were yet in the state of probation, without having any temporal settlement, their Divine Lawgiver took care to guard them against indulging the delusive hope, that care and labour would be dispensed with in the promised inheritance. He expressly taught them in the statutes enacted for their government, that the gradation of rank and property would be indispensable, even in the peculiar constitution of their state when settled in the land flowing with milk and honey. On drawing towards this great object of their expectations, it was natural for the meanest person in the congregation to look for some permanent establishment, and an ample competency in the general division of the conquered countries. The blessing of Abraham being unlimited, each of his descendants might have thought himself entitled to an estate equal to that of his neighbour, while the several tribes were in danger, unless some fixed rule should be established by the sovereign authority, of falling into contentions about the partition of the lands. Therefore to prevent anarchy, and to main-

tain the balance between the different classes of society, by making them acquainted with their respective duties and privileges, explicit rules were given for the conduct of each; among which, the precepts respecting the wealthy and the indigent deserve particular consideration. "The poor shall never cease out of the land; therefore I command thee, saying, 'Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy in thy land.'" Here the lower orders of men were instructed in the important truth, calculated to render them virtuous and contented, serviceable to the state, and acceptable in the sight of Heaven; "The rich and the poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all." Prov. xxii. 2. Proper as it may be to encourage that spirit of industry which aims at a honest independence; it is no less so to inculcate upon those who move in the lowest station of life, the duty of thankfulness. When it is said that "the poor should never cease in the land," we are not to take the declaration as an encouragement to idleness, or to suppose that poverty is a virtue. So far from this, the blessings promised to the obedient Israelites, marked expressively the Divine favour as making prosperous the works of their hands. But since, in the fluctuation of human affairs, the subordinate conditions must be very widely extended even in the best and most flourishing communities, the number of labouring poor and of the virtuous in distress, will be unavoidably proportionate to the magnitude of the whole. Free agents themselves, no less than the rich, such a mass will be differently shaded; and though some may be enabled to urge their way upwards, by perseverance, to a situation of easy competence, if not of affluence, the majority will necessarily remain in the lowly state in which they were originally placed by an all-wise and merciful Provi-

dence. In like manner, though many families may subsist for generations in the possession of their paternal estates, with increased honours and wealth ; yet others, perhaps without any visible fault, shall suddenly decline and sink into abject poverty and complete obscurity. "The poor, therefore, can never cease out of the land ;" nor is it fit they should, since whatever they may be apt to think of their lot in life, it is determined by the Lord as much for the benefit of those who are called to it, as for their superiors. But if a hardy peasantry contributes to the national support and security ; or industrious mechanics promote arts and commerce by their labour ; the rich, on the other hand, enable the one to cultivate the soil for their advantage, and the others to obtain a profitable employment for their ingenuity.

It may be said, indeed, that in all this there is a reciprocity of interests, and a mutual communication of benefits ; but the debt of gratitude must be large from those who, without the aid derived from the wealthy and powerful, would be devoid of many comforts, liable to every injury and oppression, or exposed to the miseries of savage life. But numerous as the obligations of the lower classes are to their superiors, the rich and great again are in many respects under strong ties of affection and duty to the poorest of their brethren. It might be sufficient in this place to say, that the distinction between them is the order of his providence who has marked the boundaries of men, and determined their habitations ; who raises some and depresses others, for the wise and gracious purpose of advancing universal order and happiness. But he has made a decree that "the poor shall never cease in the land ;" and for this reason, among many others, that the rich, who are the stewards of his gifts, should always have objects towards whom they may faithfully discharge their trust. In this point of view the poor stand in a

useful relation to their wealthy neighbours, by affording them constant lessons for the exercise of their duty; and for cultivating the graces of humility and meekness, love and tenderness. The law which binds together the rich and poor, has prescribed rules for the conduct of both; and while it enjoins obedience on those who are in that state of dependence which is the appointment of God, it requires no less forcibly, from the elevated orders, an enlarged and habitual benevolence. "Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy in thy land."

In this precept the rich are taught to regard the poor and needy as members of the same great family with themselves; and even as being their equals in his sight, who is the common Parent of mankind, and the Sovereign of the universe. Whatever may be the distinctions which, for the general advantage, he has thought proper to make in his household, here below the rich and the poor are brethren; and when the time of their respective trials and probations shall be ended, he will say to the pious mendicant, Come up hither, to the place of honour and happiness; while the griping miser, and the wanton waster of God's bounty, the hard-hearted oppressor, and he who never felt for any wants or distresses but his own, shall "lift up their eyes in torments."

"Blessed then is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness." Ps. xli. 1—3.

MARCH THE SEVENTEENTH.

THE PROMISE OF CHRIST.

Deuteronomy, xviii. 15.—*The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.*

THE insertion of this prediction in the body of statutes imparted to Israel by the hand of Moses, plainly intimated that his institution was to be of temporary duration, and that his authority would be superseded by that of a prophet and legislator, teaching doctrines of universal import, and enacting laws of perpetual obligation. But of whom this was spoken, or to what period the promise referred, continued an object of earnest inquiry for many ages. Still the antient Jewish church invariably grounded upon this declaration the full expectation of some glorious personage to be raised up by the Almighty from the midst of his people, with a broader commission and greater powers than those of the distinguished lawgiver who brought their fathers out of Egypt, and conducted them unto the borders of the promised land. It was not till long after the cessation of prophecy in the Hebrew state, that any one thought of looking into the history of that nation for the object foretold by Moses. If the prophecy, however, was fulfilled while Israel enjoyed its peculiar theocracy, it may be asked, why was the accomplishment so obscure at the time, and for such a number of years afterwards; so that in every succeeding period, down to the termination of that polity, the same hope still continued to prevail among the learned and devout, as well as the nation at large? By some it has been supposed that Joshua was the person intended; but they who assent to

this notion, must show in what respects that great commander was a lawgiver and prophet, since nothing appears in the record of his actions to justify his claim to either of those characters. Besides, that which completely sets aside this application of the prophecy, is the assertion which concludes the history of Moses, "That there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto him, whom the Lord knew face to face." Deut. xxxiv. 10. Now whether this addition to the Pentateuch was made by Joshua himself, or by some other authorized person, it fully proves that the promise of Moses was yet to be realized when this part of the sacred canon received its completion. In succeeding times there were many illustrious and highly favoured persons who administered judgment in Israel, and delivered prophecies; but none of them resembled Moses in proclaiming laws, establishing new institutions, and confirming their mission by such signs and wonders as were wrought in Egypt and the wilderness. It is equally plain, that what did not apply to any judicial or inspired character in the commonwealth of Israel, was far from being perfected in the prophetic succession to which some expositors have endeavoured to bend this remarkable prediction. But the declaration of Moses cannot be so interpreted without a glaring violation of the legitimate construction of language; for the words are express, that some particular person should come under the denomination of a prophet, and exhibit unequivocal proofs of his divinity. Now all those who appeared in the capacity of public teachers or seers in the different periods of the Jewish state, did themselves adhere to the law of Moses, and they endeavoured to preserve the people in the same course of obedience. But what is still more decisive on this subject, all the prophets sent by Heaven, from age to age, continued to direct the national attention towards the advent of that glorious

Person, who should illuminate by his doctrine not only the dwellings of Jacob, but the most distant regions of the earth, from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same. This was the point in which all the lines of prophecy centred; and therefore so long as any new revelation continued to be made in illustration of this primary article of faith, it was evident that the era predicted by the Hebrew legislator remained yet in the womb of futurity. Thus the general expectation was increased by every additional mark which served to render more distinct the promised blessing; so that as the prophetic roll unfolded and approached near to the great object of universal desire, it became the fixed belief of the people that the Teacher and Leader to come would eclipse all who had gone before him. Hence, in whatever estimation they held the inspired founder of their state, and the various instructors who had been specially raised up among them, by the goodness of the Almighty, the children of Israel invariably continued to look forward for more splendid times in the administration of one whom they emphatically called **THE PROPHET**. Accordingly, the appearance of any extraordinary person among them, never failed to rouse attention and produce inquiry into his character and pretensions. This was remarkably the case when the Baptist drew multitudes after him "from Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, who were baptized of him, confessing their sins." Matt. iii. 5, 6. While the people who admired the power of his preaching, and witnessed the austerity of his life, "mused in their hearts whether he were the Christ or not," some of the priests and Levites belonging to the Pharisees were sent to him with this question: "Art thou that prophet?" This shows what the general expectation was at this time, and that the learned and unlearned equally looked for his

coming "of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write." John, i. 45.

The Baptist well knew that he was the precursor of this illustrious Personage, of whose speedy manifestation he had a clear presage ; yet, when in prison, the holy man sent his disciples to Jesus, saying, "Art thou He that should come ; or do we look for another?" Without stopping here to examine into the motives of this inquiry, it must be considered as another proof that the Saviour then expected was, in the general estimation, the same with the Prophet foretold by Moses. By whatever name he was called, according to the various descriptions given of him in the Scriptures, the object of desire was one and the same, whether the SON OF DAVID, the MESSIAH, or more commonly THAT PROPHET.

What the people at large believed, and made the ground of their hope, the Sanhedrim very readily allowed to be the truth, though when some applied the prediction to Jesus, certain of the Scribes and Pharisees, pretending to be wiser than others, replied, "Search and look ; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." John, vii. 52. This, however, was a direct admission that the prophecies relating to the Messiah had not then been accomplished ; and in their confession we have the fullest evidence which the nature of the case requires, that the person mentioned in this particular promise of Moses continued to be the hope of Israel till the advent of Christ. In what respects our Lord agreed with what was foretold of him, will be apparent to every one who compares his character and conduct, the miracles he wrought, and the predictions he delivered, with the oracles in which his doctrines and works were exactly delineated. If the accomplishment had not been complete, and the resemblance perfect in all points, St. Peter would not have ventured to cite a passage so well known and understood, in the porch of the

temple, to prove that Jesus Christ was the Holy One, and the Just, of whom Moses had spoken, and all the prophets. But before this five thousand witnesses made the application, when in the desert they experienced the bounty of the Redeemer, who multiplied for their sustenance five barley loaves and two small fishes, "then those men, when they had seen the miracle which Jesus did, said, 'This is of a truth THAT PROPHET that should come into the world.'" John, vi. 14.

MARCH THE EIGHTEENTH.

JUDGMENTS UPON ISRAEL.

Deuteronomy, xxviii. 62.—*And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the Lord thy God.*

WHEN Moses delivered the oracle that a Prophet would be raised up in the midst of Israel, he added this injunction, "Unto Him ye shall hearken;" and in the repetition of the same promise, soon after the Lord himself declares, "Whosoever will not hearken unto my words, which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him." As every divine precept involves blessings and judgments suited to the nature of the command, and the circumstances of those to whom it was given, we find the legislator of Israel exhibiting a view of the prosperity attending obedience, and a picture of the misery that would be their portion if they "hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord their God." It is observable that the blessings, though rich and abundant, are dispatched in a summary manner, while the curses are drawn out in terrible array, and their operations described with a

minuteness and precision, more resembling the detail of events that have passed than of evils to come. If these denunciations are compared with the manner in which the Jewish polity terminated, and with the present state of Jacob's posterity, we shall see reason to admire this graphical accuracy in predictions uttered more than fifteen hundred years before their accomplishment. The comparison will indeed present a complete demonstration, that the Prophet foretold by Moses has long since been manifested, and that the people among whom he appeared, have literally suffered all that was threatened in the book of the law for rejecting him. In this catalogue of woes, it is expressly stated, that disobedient Israel should "become an universal astonishment, proverb, and a bye-word;" which description is so characteristic of the condition the Jews have been in ever since the Romans took away their place and nation, that to doubt the application, or the period when the misery commenced, would betray equal blindness with that which infatuated the sufferers, and brought ruin upon them. But that the interpretation might not be mistaken when the time of fulfilment should arrive, the instruments of the Divine vengeance were delineated with an exactness which must confound credulity, and shake the confidence of prejudice. "The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favour to the young." This account agrees with no race of warlike adventurers recorded in connection with the Jewish history but the Romans, whose manners were fierce, their progress rapid, and their victories attended with circumstances of peculiar and indiscriminate cruelty. These haughty conquerors truly came from far, or, according to the phraseology of

those times. from the ends of the earth ; and to their language the inhabitants of Palestine were utter strangers. But as if the great prophetic outline required more decisive characters, the legislator of Israel proceeds to particularize the manner in which that state should fall, and its capital be demolished. " And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, untill thy high and fenced walls come down wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land ; and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, throughout all thy land which the Lord thy God hath given thee." The Prophet foretold by Moses, gave a similar notice to Jerusalem of her impending fate: " For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side ; and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee ; because thou knewest not, or wouldest not acknowledge the time of thy visitation." Luke, xix. 43, 44. The horrors of this invasion, which occurred about forty years after the rejection of the Messiah, were painted in deep and glowing colours by Moses, under the guidance of the Spirit, before the people set foot in the promised land, or the nation destined to be the implement of vengeance was in existence: " And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee: so that the man that is tender among you, and very delicate, his eyes shall be evil toward his brother, and toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the remnant of his children which he shall leave ; so that he will not give to any of them of the flesh of his children, whom he shall eat : because he hath nothing left him in the siege and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee in all thy gates. The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not ad-

venture to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, and toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children which she shall bear; for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates." The Divine Instructor, of whom Moses prophesied and exhorted his people to obey, completed this affecting piece by laying down the mark which should distinguish the precise time and place of the fearful scene. "When ye shall see Jerusalem encompassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the country enter thereto: for these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled." Luke, xxi. 20—24. Here then it is plain that Moses and Jesus describe precisely the same catastrophe, but each with peculiar circumstances; the one delineating in terms of affecting amplification, the miseries that should distinguish the siege of some place, which he does not name, while the other points the prediction directly to Jerusalem, whose inhabitants he graciously warns of the dangers about to fall upon their devoted city. How the whole was verified, we learn from the testimony of an historian, whose veracity cannot be called in question, since he was an eye-witness of

what he relates ; and his reputation was too great, both among the Romans and his own countrymen, to suppose that he would publish any thing but truth on a subject so open to detection as that of the Jewish war. Josephus gives a most interesting account of the progress made by the armies under Titus ; and it is worthy of observation, that he mentions undesignedly the circumstance of their entering Judea on the eastern border, and carrying their ravages forward to the opposite coast ; which corresponded with the declaration of our Lord : “ As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.” Matt. xxiv. 27, 28. Thus literally were the prophecies fulfilled, which described the velocity and rapacity of the fierce invaders, by the appropriate image of birds of rapid flight pouncing upon their prey. But it is in the siege of Jerusalem that the lines of coincidence will be found to tally with the utmost exactness, between the page of history and the word of prophecy.

When Titus first encamped before the city, he suffered those who were desirous of escaping to depart without molestation ; but at last the Zealots, who had the command of the place, kept such strict guard over the gates, that it was almost as difficult for any of the inhabitants to get out as for the Romans to enter. This increased the famine to such a degree, that many sold their inheritance for a measure of wheat, which they devoured secretly, without baking it into bread, lest it should be stolen from them. They also took their meat from the fire half dressed, and snatched it from one another, without paying any regard to the wants of the old or the cravings of the young. Wives caught the bread from the mouths of their husbands, and children again seized it from them ; but what was still more extraordinary, mothers

would even take the scanty morsel out of the hands of their little ones, and suffer them to perish for hunger in their arms.

In this climax of woes, the story of a noble and wealthy woman named Mary stands dreadfully pre-eminent. She had an estate beyond Jordan, but happening to be shut up in Jerusalem at the time of the siege, the seditions robbed her of all the property she brought with her, and the little store of provisions which she had purchased. Maddened with grief, when the plunderers were departed, she took the infant from her breast, slew it with her own hands, and having devoured a part, laid by the rest. The parties who were continually on the prowl in search of concealed food, coming by the house and smelling drest meat, broke open the doors, and threatened the woman with instant death unless she produced the provision which she had secreted. "I purposely kept some of it for you," said the unhappy creature, and bringing forth the smoking remains of her babe, set the horrible repast before them. Inured as these wretches were to scenes of distress, and lost to all sense of pity, they yet recoiled from the dismal sight, and hastening forth, imparted the sad story to all they met. The whole city was shocked at this abomination, which made many envy their friends who were so fortunate as to die at the beginning of these sorrows. Thus was the prediction of Moses fulfilled in all its terrible circumstances; as well as that affecting address of our Lord to the women of Jerusalem, "Behold, the days are coming in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck." Luke, xxiii. 29. In this siege alone, perished by famine and the sword eleven hundred thousand Jews; and ninety-seven thousand captives fell into the hands of the Romans, who disposed of them as slaves among other nations. The

principal mart for these outcasts was Alexandria, whither they were conveyed in such numbers, that at length none would purchase them, and they were literally given away, agreeable to what was foretold by the legislator; "And the Lord shall bring thee again into Egypt with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you." The other points in the prophetic view of the excision of Israel, are visible at this day; for what country does not possess some of these astonishing fragments of Providence? Though the seed of Jacob have for many ages been severed from their parent land, and "scattered among all people from one end of the earth even unto the other;" yet the revolutions of empires have failed to absorb this singular race; and the fires of persecution to destroy them: crumbled as it were into dust, they yet preserve their component qualities and peculiar characteristics; so that without any co-operation, or even knowledge of each other's existence, these dispersed children of Abraham preserve their ancient distinctions, and still cling to the national hope of deliverance; for which purpose they maintain an inflexible spirit of separation from the rest of mankind. When, therefore, we behold this remnant of God's inheritance, let us consider them as "Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the Fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." Rom. ix. 4, 5.

MARCH THE NINETEENTH.

THE SONG OF MOSES.

Deuteronomy, xxxii. 2, 3.—*My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distill as the dew; as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass; because I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto our God.*

THIS prophetic ode, which Moses was commanded to write for a memorial or witness to the children of Israel, contains a summary view of the mystery of redemption, describing its author and operations, its objects and effects. The visible manifestation of Jehovah upon earth, for the salvation of man, forms the grand theme, in connection with which the adoption of the family of Jacob, as his portion, is expressed under the beautiful figure of a parent bird fostering and training its young ones; while the reason for this election and preparation is assigned to be, that they might become the depositaries of the promise, and particularly of that essential doctrine, the Divine Unity, in opposition to the corruptions of polytheism, which covered the world with moral darkness. This highly favoured people, however, are represented as abusing the privileges conferred upon them, and as despising that blessing, the knowledge of which they were the instruments of conveying to the rest of mankind. The ungrateful returns of Israel for the extraordinary benefits showered upon them, and their wilful blindness amidst the splendour of revelation, form the most pathetic subjects of complaint and impassioned threats of the Divine vengeance. But though the degeneracy of this people is drawn with great force, and their punishment painted in lively colours, the gracious declaration is given, that they

shall ultimately be delivered from their adversaries, and made to rejoice in the common salvation. The work of judgment is also that of mercy: therefore, on the previous designs of Providence being completed, Israel shall be gathered, "when the Lord seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left." The most learned of the Apostles, speaking of the excision and future restoration of Israel, founds the assurance of the latter event on this very prophecy, and that in terms which afford a complete commentary upon the entire song. "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers; and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy, as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people." Rom. xv. 8—10. The last passage cited by St. Paul, is that which concludes the triumphal song of Moses: "Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his people." It is certain, from the sacred history, that the inditer of this exquisite piece was the same glorious Being who brought Israel out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; who "provided for them in the wilderness, led them about, and instructed them; keeping them as the apple of his eye." He it was against whom they murmured and were rebellious: now it is expressly asserted that "they tempted Christ," and this is confirmed by the declaration that "he also was the minister of the circumcision." Jesus did indeed reveal himself to the children of Abraham; but if we look to the course of the Apostle's argument, we shall find him expressly alluding to "things written aforetime for our learning," by which must be understood the early history of the

people of God. The preaching of the Gospel, in the first place, to the circumcision, does not constitute the whole meaning of St. Paul; for if it did, he would not have referred to the ancient oracles in illustration of so simple and plain a fact. But in truth his intention was to show that the same gracious Being who became manifested in the flesh under the circumcision, was the minister of the covenant of which that sacramental rite was the seal; that he it was who held communications with the fathers, and guided their posterity, forming them into a particular society under his own immediate government. The Apostle affirms also, in unison with the word of prophecy, that though Israel by disobedience had forfeited the blessing and inheritance, yet on the accomplishment of the fulness of the Gentiles, "even they also should be saved." Rom. xi. 26.

The glorious Divinity then, under whose immediate direction Moses wrote this song, was no other than the "ETERNAL WORD, which in the appointed time was made flesh, and dwelt among us full of grace and truth." John, i. 14. At the opening of this poetical prophecy, he describes the success of his gospel, and the manner in which it should spread throughout the earth: "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distill as the dew; as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass; because I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness to our God." The authority of the speaker is expressed in the preliminary address to the heavens and the earth; by which we may understand an appeal for the dignity of his character and the truth of his mission, to the mystery of his incarnation, the majesty with which it should be attended, and the supernatural works to be performed by him in the course of his ministry, as well as in his final triumph over the powers of darkness. The beginning of Christianity was indeed a

glorious display of Divine power ; but notwithstanding this, we find its subsequent success and final advancement, described by such images as comport with the ordinary process of nature. Contrary to the vain pretensions of the Jews, who affect to believe that the establishment of the 'Messiah's kingdom is to be almost an instantaneous act ; he has himself, by the mouth of the prophet, described it as a progressive course of operation. That vegetation, which is most essential to human benefit, is carried on by slow degrees and under various forms. Much of it requires the labour of man, and the whole depends upon the influences of heaven. The solar heat, and the distillations of the clouds, are equally necessary to prepare the earth and invigorate the seed, to expand the leaves and perfect the grain. To this order of nature the work of redemption is compared, and the Author of it condescends to liken his doctrine to the action of the misty rain upon the tender herb, and of the copious showers upon the grass. Nothing could more elegantly represent the first promulgation of the Gospel, than this allusion to the work of God in the creation, which so appositely figured the gradual opening of the sacred mysteries by that Divine Teacher, who "spake as never man spake." Even those disciples who were nearest to his person, and most intimately acquainted with his sentiments, obtained their knowledge of the religion they were to preach by regular steps ; nor did they fully understand the nature and extent of it till after the departure of their Lord. Thus did that divine grace which was destined to become a mighty stream, and to spread the glad tidings of salvation over all lands, descend at first like the small rain upon the tender herb.

The propagation of the Gospel in the apostolic age, was indeed attended with a more visible display of power ; for they who had hitherto been weak, were be-

come strong by the effusion of the Spirit : " And they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." Mark, xvi. 20. It is observable that the royal Prophet in his last divine hymn celebrates the glory of the Messiah's kingdom, and describes the manner in which its blessings should be unfolded by the same imagery with that used by the legislator of Israel : " He shall come down like grain upon the mown grass ; as showers that water the earth." This is explained by the parallelism which, though in a primary sense it may be true of Solomon, is only applicable in its extent to the spiritual reign of Christ : " In his days shall the righteous flourish ; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. His name shall endure for ever ; his name shall be continued as long as the sun ; and men shall be blessed in him : all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever ; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen." Ps. lxxii. 6—19.

MARCH THE TWENTIETH.

THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST.

Deuteronomy, xxxiii. 5.—*And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together.*

THE last days of the conductor and legislator of Israel bore a great resemblance to those of the venerable patriarch, by whose name the chosen people were distinguished. Both these illustrious characters

possessed their faculties to the close of life; both died at a distance from the promised land, after delivering blessings to the surrounding tribes, descriptive of their respective posterities; and both in explicit terms directed the general attention and expectation to the Messiah. According to the prophecy of Jacob, the judicial authority was to continue in the hands of Judah till the coming of Shiloh, in whom the theocracy was to terminate, by his gathering of the Jews and Gentiles into one spiritual communion, without regard to ceremonial distinctions. To this prediction that of Moses corresponds, though in our version it is made very obscure, by reversing the prospective construction in the most material passage, which is in truth the proper key to all that follows. Instead of reading, "There shall be a king in Jeshurun," our translators have so perplexed the sense as to make it seem that Moses himself was this sovereign; and that the scene, which he delineates as what should take place in the fulness of time, had already passed away. Thus the beauty of the piece is lost by throwing the person who gives life to the whole into such deep shade, that neither his divinity nor his operations can be discerned. But when the preliminary declaration is considered as the presage of a new state to arise under some mighty potentate, a clear and steady light is diffused over the whole prophetic representation. Let us therefore take this divine composition according to the genius and laws of the language in which it was conveyed. "Jehovah came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir; he shone forth from Mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints; from his right hand went forth the law of fire for them. Verily he loveth the nations, and all the saints are in his hand; they also shall sit down at his feet and receive of his words. Moses imparted a law to us, the church of Jacob. But in Jeshurun there shall be a king when the heads

of the nations are gathered together with the tribes of Israel." Such is the opening of the prophecy, from which it is evident that the dominion of this mighty and merciful sovereign shall be universal, embracing the widely scattered families of the earth, and bringing them into willing subjection, solely by the influence of his words or doctrine. This wonderful Person unites in himself the regal and sacerdotal character. In the former quality he belongs especially to the tribe of Judah, and as such the prediction of his appearance is made the matter of earnest desire. "Hear Jehovah the voice of Judah, and bring Him (that is, the king of Jeshurun spoken of before) unto his people." But his coming, however glorious to himself and beneficial to the nations who shall ultimately repose under his dominion, will not be attended with immediate splendour; on the contrary, this universal King is to ascend his throne after a hard conflict, which he must endure, supported only by his inherent power, against many adversaries; for thus runs the prediction: "Let his hands be sufficient for him; and be thou a help to him from his enemies." The style of prophecy is in its very nature unavoidably obscure, being sometimes sententious, at others figurative; now imperative, and again, as in the case before us, plaintive and supplicatory. Now the petitionary form seems to have been here purposely adopted, to indicate that the object of Judah's hope was not only very remote, but that his coming would be under circumstances of peculiar difficulty, trouble, and opposition. The explanation of this prediction will be found in that sublime epinicion which the evangelical prophet puts into the mouth of the mighty Victor, who issues forth from the region of obscurity, arrayed in majesty, and travelling in the greatness of his strength: "I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with me; for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample

them in my fury ; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help ; and I wondered that there was none to uphold ; therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me ; and my fury it upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth." Isa. lxiii. 3—6. It is plain then, that however glorious the reign of Messiah shall be, it was never designed to become so at once, or by any speedy conquest. The whole history of our redemption disproves the flattering conceit, and the correspondence between the system of prophecy and the series of events, shows that the order of accomplishment was intended by Divine Wisdom to be gradual, for the exercise of faith and the trial of obedience. We have seen that the word of promise began faintly, in the assurance that deliverance should come, and the dominion of the enemy be destroyed ; but more than this was not revealed to man till several ages had elapsed, and even then the declaration of a universal blessing to proceed from the righteous patriarch was indefinitely marked, both with respect to the object and the time of advent. At the close of Jacob's life, indeed, the promise became more distinct, by being fixed in one tribe, and the period of fulfillment was so far determined as to place the certainty of it out of all question. No skill or contrivance could succeed in bringing forward an imposture, because the temporal interest of a formidable tribe would be engaged against any such design ; nor was it in the power of man to render the fact of the Shiloh's coming doubtful, since it was to be noted by an event over which no human artifice or combination could have any controul. With the ascension of the Messiah the jurisdiction or power

of Judah was to decline till it should be utterly overpowered in the splendour of the Sun of Righteousness. Here then is an unerring standard to determine whether the promise hath failed, or the Messiah hath appeared according to what was predicted of him. Both the progenitor and the lawgiver of Israel foretold the coming of this Potentate in the line of Judah; one declared that with him the sceptre should depart from this tribe, and the other described his condition as attended with circumstances of great humiliation and suffering to himself, though productive of endless blessings to the peoples or nations that should be gathered under his sway.

If it be here asked, what could be that sovereignty of which temporal grandeur and earthly possessions formed no part, the answer hath been given by HIM who, when he stood bound at the bar of the Roman procurator, thus asserted his high dignity: "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." Such was the impression made by this majestic declaration upon the heathen governor, that he went forth and said to the Jews, "I find in him no fault at all. But ye have a custom that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber." John, xviii. 36—40.

MARCH THE TWENTY-FIRST.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST.

Deuteronomy, xxxiii. 8.—And of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy Holy One, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah.

IN close connection with the blessing of Judah stands that of Levi, illustrating each other, and both converging in the same object; the one asserting Messiah's universal dominion, and the other defining its spiritual nature. According to the high authority of an Apostle, the Israelites "tempted Christ, and saw his works forty years in the wilderness." 1 Cor. x. 9. Heb. iii. 8, 9. With such an exposition, therefore, we shall have no difficulty in understanding the peculiar terms used in the benediction of Levi, nor in comprehending the scope of the whole prophecy. It will be necessary, however, in the first place to restore to the text what our translators have unaccountably omitted in their version; and it will be proper also to give a more literal construction of the entire prediction. "And of Levi he said, Thy Thummim and thy Urim shall be with THE MAN, thy HOLY ONE, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah: who saith of his father and his mother, I respect not; and who does not acknowledge for his brethren, nor allow any to be his sons, but such as observe thy saying, and keep thy covenant. These shall teach Jacob thy judgments and Israel thy laws: they shall offer incense before thee, and a perfect sacrifice upon thine altar. Bless, O Jehovah, his power, and favourably accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of those who lift up themselves against him, and hate him; so that they rise not

again." Such is the prophecy, from which it is evident that the priestly office was to pass away with the theocracy, and be transferred to another line. It was in fact to return into the hands of the Divine Person from whom the appointment originally came, whose excellence the chiefs of Lévi proved at Massah, and against whom they rebelled at the waters of Meribah. The sum of the two first blessings then amounts to this, that the polity of Israel was to be taken down, that it might give place to another state of things. This was to happen at the coincidence of two circumstances, the decay of the civil jurisdiction, and the defection of the spiritual power. Precisely at such a period was the Shiloh, or King of Jeshurun, to arise for the gathering of the nations; and according to the sacred benediction, at this crisis also was the Holy One to appear in human nature as their gracious and perpetual High Priest. This junction of the regal and sacerdotal character was afterwards foretold by the Psalmist: "The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness; from the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedeck. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath." Ps. cx. 2—5. The declaration that the Thummim and Urim should be withdrawn from Lévi, was the same thing as denouncing the abrogation of the Aaronical institution altogether; and to this agrees the assertion of the royal Prophet, that the Messiah should be a priest of the order of Melchizedeck. The Urim and Thummim constituted the principal ornament of the pontifical vesture; and hereby, as an oracle, the divine direction was consulted upon difficult and extraordinary occasions.

In what manner this was done, is beside our present purpose to consider; but as the word URIM signifies 'lights,' and THUMMIM denotes 'perfections,' it seems probable that the response was made known to the high-priest by a particular illumination on the precious stones which were set in the breast-plate. This remarkable privilege ceased long before the utter extinction of the Jewish state, and thus the prophecy concerning Levi was fulfilled in a literal sense. But the prediction extends farther than to the simple fact of silencing the oracular authority of the high-priest, and expressly declares that the whole office in all its parts, but with greater perfection, shall center in the MAN who was the HOLY ONE, before whom Aaron and his successors ministered under the law. The event corresponded exactly with the prophecy; for at the time when the true Melchizedeck became manifest in the flesh, the political independence of Israel was lost, and the Levitical constitution was reduced to the lowest state of degradation. The prophetic benediction contains another remarkable view of his character, "who is before all things, and by whom all things consist; who is the head of the body, the church; the beginning and first-born from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence" Col. i. 17, 18. It may seem strange to say of one so exalted in the perfection of holiness, that he "respects not his father nor his mother; and that he acknowledges neither his brethren nor children:" yet thus much certainly does appear in the letter of the prophecy; and there is an incident in the Gospel which confirms the presage: "Then one said unto Jesus, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For

whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." Matt. xii. 47—50. But however apposite this illustration may be, the mystical description of Levi's Holy One undoubtedly involves somewhat more than his mere external deportment, or any occasional observation that should fall from his lips. The evangelical prophet, in order most forcibly to express the pre-existence of the Man of Sorrows, says, "Who shall declare his generation?" And the inspired expositor of the ancient mysteries, in maintaining the divinity of Christ, accounts for the typical character of Melchizedek: "Who was by interpretation King of Righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of Peace; without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God, he abideth a priest continually." Heb. vii. 2, 3.

Christ is both the Urim and the Thummim to his church, for this is the "light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world;" and "he that doth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought of God." John, i. 9. iii. 21. Whatever notions men might have had of the Deity, or conception of their relation to him here and hereafter, nothing certain could be known of his perfections, or of a future state, without divine revelation. This was imparted by degrees, and the knowledge of the will of God gradually unfolded itself by the word of prophecy, till the coming of Christ, "who brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." 2 Tim. i. 10. He hath made us acquainted with the divine mind and intention for the ground of our faith, and hath given us unerring rules for the regulation of our practice. Not only so; but considering the sinfulness of our nature and continual aptitude to deviate from the line of duty, he

has condescended to become our example in holiness ; " the way," as well as " the truth and the life." John, xiv. 6. Above all, Christ is endeared to us by the sacrifice he made to purchase our redemption from the condemnation into which sin has brought the whole human race. . Being no less truly the MAN predicted from the beginning, than the HOLY ONE, he hath wrought out a perfect righteousness for us, by the unspotted purity of his life ; while, by the one oblation of his death, he hath made a full and sufficient atonement for the sins of the whole world. From the beginning of his life to the close of it, Christ exercised the office of priest ; for in his childhood he displayed the prophetic character among the doctors in the temple ; and amidst his own agonies upon the cross, he pronounced the forgiveness of sins, and opened the kingdom of glory to the penitent malefactor. Christ therefore being now a high-priest of good things to come, by the shedding of his own blood, hath entered into heaven itself, to appear in the presence of God for us ; where he acts as our mediator and surety, our intercessor and advocate. (Heb. ix. 24.) When the law brings an accusation against the sinner, and justice demands judgment for the offence ; then does Christ plead his own obedience and death on behalf of the penitent, who is justified by faith in the merits of the Redeemer. The whole church, and every individual member of it, are therefore complete in him, " who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption." 1 Cor. i. 30, 31. All that the Messiah accomplished and suffered as MAN, was to render our persons and services acceptable in the sight of God ; and for this purpose also he, as the HOLY ONE, ever liveth to make intercession for us at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Thus is the prophecy fulfilled in the widest extent, " that those united to him shall

offer incense before the throne of God, and a perfect sacrifice upon his altar." They are, indeed, what the Apostle describes them, "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that they should show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light; which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." 1 Pet. ii. 9, 10.

MARCH THE TWENTY-SECOND.

THE DEATH OF MOSES.

Deuteronomy, xxxiv. 10.—And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.

THIS supplement to the account of Moses, while it forcibly delineates his character, points evidently to the promise made by him, that another Prophet should arise in Israel like unto himself. Now this addition to the Pentateuch was evidently made long after the death of that extraordinary person, for it speaks of the prophetic succession as being already very much extended, and yet the prediction remained unfulfilled. There were indeed many illustrious prophets raised up from time to time, but not one of that divine order resembled Moses; for of none could it be said that he received laws and ordinances, denunciations and promises, immediately from God, "with whom he communed face to face." The gift of prophecy ceased in the Jewish church without the appearance of any such person as had been foretold, and a solemn pause ensued, which continued many years before any thing like the sign of his approach could be discerned by those who watched day and

night for the consolation of Israel. In the fulness of time he came unto his own; but instead of receiving him, the elders of the people said, "We know that God spake by Moses; but as for this fellow, we know not whence he is." John, ix. 29. Thus did Jesus experience similar treatment with Moses, who, when he interposed to succour his distressed countrymen, received from them this ungrateful reproach, "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" Even after his deliverance of the people from slavery, they behaved towards him with the basest ingratitude, and continued to vex him by their perverse and rebellious spirit, almost to the end of his life. But the parallel extends through a variety of circumstances, which could not have happened by chance, nor been produced by human foresight and contrivance.

Moses, in his infancy, was wonderfully delivered from the cruel mandate of an oppressor, who ordered all the male children of the Hebrews to be destroyed; Christ also was saved from the savage decree of a sanguinary tyrant, and in Egypt he found an asylum till those were dead who sought his life. Moses, when he came to maturity, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, thereby rejecting the riches and honours which that distinction would have procured him, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Heb. xi. 25. In like manner the great Prophet, of whom he wrote, resisted the various allurements of the tempter, and preferred hunger and thirst, persecution and death, for the redemption of man, to all the kingdoms of this world, with the glory of them. Moses triumphed over the magicians of Egypt, and made them confess that the least of his miracles was wrought by the finger of God. Christ expelled many demons from those who were possessed, and compelled them to acknowlege

his divinity, saying. "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?" Matt. viii. 29. At the stretching forth of the hand of Moses a dreadful darkness was spread out over Egypt, which lasted three days. When the Saviour of Men hung upon the cross, there was darkness over all the land from the sixth to the ninth hour. And as the plague of darkness was followed by the destruction of the first-born of Egypt, so the obscuration of the sun at our Lord's crucifixion prefigured the total extinction of the Jewish polity, and the dispersion of that people among all nations. This awful sign was indeed expressive, in another manner, of what he had before predicted: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light; the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." Matt. xxiv. 29.

When Moses lifted up his rod, the channel of the Red Sea was laid bare, so that the children of Israel passed over on dry ground; while their pursuers perished in the retreating waters. Christ walked on the agitated billows, and enabled one of his disciples to do the same; his word also allayed a furious tempest, so that they who were in the ship exclaimed, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" Matt. viii. 27. The deliverance of Israel from the cruel bondage in which they had lain for many years, was an affecting representation of the great salvation accomplished by Christ, for the redemption of mankind from the thralldom of sin and the tyranny of Satan. Before Moses received the law, of which he was to be the minister, he fasted forty days and forty nights in the mount; and the Mediator of the new covenant did the same after his inauguration, by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon him at his baptism, and previous to his public appearance as the preacher of righteousness. The

countenance of Moses shone with such splendour when he brought down the tables of the law from Sinai, that Aaron and the elders of the congregation could not stedfastly look upon him, nor hold any communication with him till he was veiled. At the transfiguration of Christ upon Mount Tabor, his "face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light;" so that the disciples who attended him were overpowered by his glory, and were sore afraid when they heard the voice from heaven, saying, "'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.'" Matt. xvii. 2. 5.

The miracles of Christ exceeded those of Moses, but some of them were very similar to what Israel saw in the wilderness, particularly that of his feeding the multitude, and leaving a quantity of fragments after the whole were satisfied. But though this, and the constant supply of manna, have a great resemblance, yet our Lord drew a stronger comparison when he said to the Jews, "'Verily, verily I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world.'" John, vi. 32, 33.

As the progress of Israel from Egypt to the promised land figured the church in her various stages of redemption and probation; so Moses, as a king and lawgiver, priest and prophet, to that people represented Christ. He had not indeed the external grandeur and pompous titles of royalty, but he exercised all the powers and duties of that office in the administration of justice and the infliction of punishment, in enacting statutes and making war. Christ also, though in a poor and lowly state, gave authoritative precepts and injunctions for the government of his church to the end of time; he denounced judgments upon sinners, and declared open hostility

against the vanities and corruptions of the world. Like Moses, who commanded the Israelites to have no communication with idolaters, this meek and merciful Saviour of Man enjoined all his followers to separate themselves from the nearest and most tender relations, who might stand between them and eternal life. "Think not," says he, "that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." Matt. x. 34, 35. Moses set up the tabernacle, and disposed all the holy furniture in proper order; he then consecrated Aaron and his sons to the ministerial service; and afterwards he chose seventy elders to be his assistants, upon whom a portion of his spirit was conferred, which enabled them to prophesy in the congregation. In all this the similitude is wonderfully exact; for the great Head of the church settled the order of this spiritual building by degrees; he instituted ordinances and sacraments, ordained an apostolical succession for the due administration of them, and, besides his twelve immediate disciples, he sent forth seventy others to preach the gospel of the kingdom. The prophetic character of Moses was most conspicuous at the close of his life, when he assured the people that another Legislator should arise, and described the heavy judgments that would be the consequence of rejecting his mission. Christ also promised his disciples that he would send them "another Comforter, who should teach them all things." John, xiv. 26. And on another occasion he declared that "though all manner of sin and blasphemy should be forgiven unto men; yet the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost should not be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come." Matt. xii. 32.

Moses, in contemplating the obduracy and de-

struction of his people, expressed his pious feelings in this affectionate wish : " Oh that they were wise, that they understood this ; that they would consider their latter end ! " Similar to this was the behaviour of our Lord, a little before his passion, when he sat over-against the capital of Judea, and beheld in spirit the calamities about to fall upon her : " O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not ! " Matt. xxiii. 37. But the parallel goes still farther ; for even in the article of death there was a similitude between these extraordinary persons. Moses was obliged to go up to the summit of Mount Nebo and die there, without entering the land of promise ; which sentence was passed upon him, " for the sake of the people," and as a punishment of his own and the national transgression. Christ suffered on Mount Calvary, " being cut off out of the land of the living ; and for the transgression of his people was he stricken," the " just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God." Isa. liii. 8. 1 Pet. iii. 18.

Of Moses it is said, that " his eye was not dim, nor was his natural force abated ; " and it does not appear that either he or Jesus experienced any bodily indisposition before they were called to suffer death. The body of the venerable legislator was so secretly disposed of, that " no man knoweth his sepulchre unto this day : " and the malicious Jews were not able, with all their contrivance, to hold that of Jesus in the tomb, or to prevent his resurrection ; though, when that event happened, they had recourse to the bungling artifice of bribing the soldiers to say, " His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept." Matt. xxviii. 13. There are incidental points common to many men, but these were all of unusual

occurrence, and therefore the correspondence of them in two persons, at so remote a distance of time from each other, and under very different circumstances, amounts to a demonstration that, "as the Almighty gave the law by the ministry of Moses, so grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." John, i. 17.

MARCH THE TWENTY-THIRD.

THE CHARGE TO JOSHUA.

Joshua, i. 8.—*This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.*

THE book of the law being completed, and the inspired penman removed to the reward of his labours, divine communications became less frequent, because the necessity of them was in a great measure superseded by this standing revelation. Every thing requisite to the knowledge of the divine will under that dispensation, was here fully and explicitly laid down, and ample provision made for the general instruction of the people in all that concerned their faith and duty. The Lord did indeed promise their leader that he would be with him as he had been with Moses; but this only amounted to the encouraging assurance that Joshua should obtain divine direction and support in every time of need. But while the chosen servant of God was animated in the great work to which he was called, with this gracious declaration, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee," he received an injunction, which taught him that the higher degrees of illumination enjoyed by his predecessor were

not to be expected, and that instead of them he must seek for wisdom in the written oracles. Joshua was undoubtedly already conversant with the historical records and institutes of his nation; for what every Israelite was enjoined to teach his children, must have been familiar to the favourite minister and appointed successor of Moses. Now though it might seem from this, as if the Holy Writings were at that time of easy comprehension, and in that view were rather adapted for practical purposes than intense application, the charge given to Joshua certainly does lead to a different conclusion. The strong and emphatic language in which it is expressed, shows that the study of the book, called by way of eminence the LAW, was even then considered as equally arduous and important. Joshua was commanded to have it continually before him, and to "meditate therein day and night." Much as the word *meditation* imports in marking that fixed and devout temper, which is necessary when the mind is engaged upon religious subjects, it certainly falls very far short of the vehement spirit and persevering industry so strongly enforced in the original precept. The Saviour, of whom Joshua was a lively type, when he asserted his divine authority against the unbelieving Jews, said to them, "Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me." John, v. 39. Here our Lord appears to have reprehended his opponents for contenting themselves with a superficial attention to the sacred writings, the thorough and serious investigation of which he maintained would fully establish the evidence of his mission. The very course here recommended to be pursued is that which, if properly conducted, would end in the discovery of eternal life, is the same contained in the exhortation given to Joshua. To search and to meditate, signifies that the persons, whose duty it was to be so

employed, should dig deeply into the Scriptures for their hidden sense, as miners penetrate into the bowels of the earth, where they separate the rocky substances with great labour and unwearied diligence, to come at the precious ores that may be concealed in them. Thus Joshua was required to explore the sacred treasury daily, and not to rest satisfied with understanding the mere letter of the Scriptures, or the knowledge which he had formerly acquired under his venerable instructor. Every new attainment was to serve as a stimulant, urging him forward to fresh researches and further improvement in the science of divine truth. The life of this illustrious commander was one of great activity, and occupied by numerous affairs of vast moment, as appears from his own admirable commentaries; yet we find him enjoined to devote no small portion of his time to the perusal of a volume, with the contents of which, from his youth up, he was well acquainted. Familiar as the Book of the Law might be to him in all its parts, Joshua was never to lay it aside, or to suffer it to depart from his thoughts; but he was "to meditate therein day and night." Frequent reference to first principles will be found expedient in every department and period of human life; and even in the most common concerns, he will be ill qualified to teach who does not review what he had formerly learnt and carefully studied.

Rooted and indelible as we may fancy ourselves to be in the primary rules and maxims of wisdom, much of what is essential will pass away from the memory by the flux of time, while the rest is endangered by the cares or the pleasures of the world. The renovation of knowledge, however, will be exceedingly difficult, if not indeed utterly impossible, when the rudiments are forgotten, and the mind by long habits of indolence or dissipation is become incapable of that disciplined state which is indispen-

sible to every branch of study. That which experience shows to be the case, even in ordinary affairs, must be equally certain in the improvement of the heart and understanding. What a man has long neglected he will not be very desirous of learning, if by the acquisition his pursuits must be changed and his pleasures lessened. Though, therefore, repentance, even at the latest hour, may be accepted, and the virtuous resolution of old age rewarded with peace at last; yet the enjoyments of him who leaves the greatest of all objects to such an uncertain period will be feeble, and his sense of the divine goodness wavering and obscure. The advice to Joshua then is a lesson, the adoption of which will be found equally conducive to present satisfaction and future felicity. If the Sacred Books be consulted daily, not for curiosity but edification, much will be obtained for the direction of our conduct and the establishment of our principles. By such a course the mind imperceptibly increases in wisdom and virtue, while, as if unconscious of any particular growth in moral and intellectual strength, it continues to press forward with the increasing energy of desire towards perfection. Mere abstract knowledge is an unprofitable incumbrance, which neither enriches the possessor, nor entitles him to the respect of mankind. He who knows much is bound to let his light shine before men, that the example of his studies, and his application of them, may influence "others to glorify their Father who is in heaven." Matt. v. 16. This was the great purport of Joshua's constant application to the sacred volume, "that he might observe to do according to all that was written therein." Superiour attainments not only involve particular obligations to the exercise of the moral duties, but they are of themselves a cause and motive of virtue. He who neglects the use of those talents which God has given him, and the means of grace

placed in his way, will receive a judgment little short of that which awaits the hardened impenitent, and the profligate libertine. It will be no excuse to allege that the life, passed without religious information, has been spent in a harmless manner; and that though the world may not have profited by its example, neither has any one been injured by its vices. Time was given to us for other purposes than to pass down its stream with idle indifference; and Divine Revelation was not imparted with so much splendour, and under such tremendous sanctions, merely to be regarded with silent admiration, and be laid aside when it should cease to be a novelty. Joshua was commanded to "study the Book of the Law day and night," with the express view that he might be kept within the path of duty, and know how to perform all that was commanded therein.

The true excellence of all learning lies in teaching us not only what is true and honest, just and pure, lovely and of good report; but the means of attaining and doing these things. This divine science, so needful to present peace and future happiness, can only be acquired through the medium of the sacred oracles, which began with Moses and ended with Jesus Christ. Here hath Wisdom fixed her abode upon earth, and here will she be ever found to reward the diligent application of those who in sincerity of heart have a desire to observe and to do all the words contained in the Book of the Law. Her invitation to every serious and devout inquirer, is, like the command laid upon Joshua, an incitement to earnest and regular exertions, by the promise of ultimate success. "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as

for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.”—Prov. ii. 1—5.

MARCH THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

THE FAITH OF RAHAB.

Joshua, ii. 11.—*The Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.*

THIS was the pious confession of a woman, whose conduct procured her the high distinction of being set forth in the Scripture as an example of the power of religion; and which is little less to her praise, of being vilified on that very account by the calumniating spirit of infidelity. But the history of Rahab, singular as it is in some particulars, affords abundant matter of instruction; and whatever cavils may be raised against her by light and sceptical minds, she will continue to hold her rank as long as the sun and moon endure, among those “worthies who have obtained a good report through faith.” Her occupation as a hostess, ambiguously rendered a harlot in the Greek version, increases the beauty of her hospitality, and gives additional lustre to her piety. Most persons in that condition of life would have been glad of the opportunity which was thus presented of recommending themselves to the favour of the government; and hardly any, on weighing the remote danger to be apprehended from a foreign army with that of incurring the immediate resentment of their own countrymen, would have hesitated on the course to be adopted when the two Israelites were demanded by the king of Jericho.

Rahab had several near relations, for whose welfare she manifested the most tender concern ; and who, according to the customary policy of those times, were certain of perishing with her if the concealment of the obnoxious strangers had been discovered. But unmoved by any personal considerations of fear or friendship, ambition or avarice, this extraordinary woman promptly resolved, at the risk of her own life, and of all that was dear to her affections in Jericho, to save her two guests, for which purpose she diverted the attention of the pursuers by an artifice, which the most severe moralist must allow to be justifiable when the helpless and the innocent are followed by malice armed with power. Having eluded a search which menaced destruction to herself and those for whom she made so great a sacrifice, Rahab appears to have received the reward of her liberality in a divine communication, which produced her own salvation and that of her family. Great indeed was the piety which she displayed in the first instance, by preferring the dictates of conscience to the plea of temporal interest ; but her glorious confession was not made till she had succeeded in delivering his servants from their enemies. Here it merits particular observation, that Rahab entered into no stipulations with the Israelites on receiving them under her roof ; neither did she make any bargain for her own advantage, when it was in her power to bind them by large promises, or to gain the favour of her own nation by giving the men up to the popular fury. She held no intercourse with the Israelites on the subject of their mission, till by her management she had provided for their present security and the means of escape. Then, and not before, she made known her religious sentiments, the firm belief which she had in the true God, and her confidence in the integrity of his people. Rahab was well acquainted with the

miracles which had been wrought in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness; she mentioned the victories that had been obtained over the Amorites, and her persuasion "that the Lord had given to Israel the land of Canaan." Now whatever terror the reports of such wonders might have excited at first, few persons of ordinary judgment would have been much affected by them, on seeing these formidable foes reduced to such common expedients as that of sending men privately to examine the state of Jericho.

Rahab, at least, might have taken this as an occasion that ought not to be neglected, of acting a patriotic part, by cutting off the spies, for whose intelligence the invading army waited with great impatience, and for the want of which their commander would be thrown into the utmost perplexity. Jericho was a large, populous, and wealthy city; the inhabitants of which were vain and voluptuous; and Rahab, by her profession, was exposed in no common degree to the allurements of gaiety and the desire of riches. Her resistance to all these temptations, aided as they were by the natural love of her country and partiality to her kindred, can be ascribed only to the force of religious conviction; or, as the Apostle has defined the principle, "by faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not: when she had received the spies with peace." Heb. xi. 31. From this it is evident that Jericho did not fall without a fair warning and overtures of mercy; for otherwise how could the people have been guilty of unbelief, and Rahab be commended for her faith? In the Sacred History many circumstances must be supposed to have occurred which the brevity of the writers has left the reader to supply. This is one of them; for in the original narrative nothing more appears than the fact that Joshua, before he passed the Jordan, sent two

men, who were most probably persons of considerable rank, to "view the land secretly, and particularly Jericho:" but from the apostolical comment, it is plain that the inhabitants of that place had been previously called to submission, and that, with the exception of Rahab, they were disobedient. The precise terms of the message, with the time and manner of its conveyance, cannot be ascertained; but from the language of Rahab it is plain that she received no information on the subject from her guests, since it is expressly said, that upon the departure of their pursuers, and before the men were laid down, she went up to them, and after professing her faith in the Lord their God, made a request that they would save her family from death when the place should fall into their hands. Her confession seems to comprize the very articles rejected by the king of Jericho and the rest of his subjects, which were, absolute submission to Israel, and an acknowledgement that "Jehovah alone, was God in heaven above and in the earth beneath." Rahab was the only person in this great city who received the messengers of Israel with peace; which expression certainly implies that the other inhabitants of Jericho treated them with violence. This compassion then towards persecuted strangers, of whom at the time she knew nothing, is an evidence of the most exalted generosity, which was the more remarkable from the meanness of her condition, the nature of her employment, and the poverty of her circumstances.

But if the humanity of Rahab claims our admiration, by its entire separation from all selfish views; the purity of her faith must raise her still higher in our esteem, when we consider its diametrical opposition to the notions in which she had been bred, and the licentious practices to which she was accustomed. The religion of Canaan, if indeed the most

debasement superstitions and vicious practices could be dignified with that name, must have been difficult to renounce by persons habituated from their infancy to the pomp of idolatry and the festivities which invariably accompanied its ceremonials. To those who know not how to appreciate the sacrifice of early impressions and venerated prejudices, the conversion of Rahab may seem of small moment; but they who look deeper into themselves, and know how hard it is to root up any favourite notion, or to abandon some pleasing custom, will readily apply to her what our Lord said of another female of the same country, "O woman, great is thy faith!" Matt. xv. 28. It was not among the least of the virtues of Rahab, that she evinced the most affectionate regard for her kindred, and that without their knowledge she comprized within the covenant of life "her father and mother, her brethren and sisters, with all that appertained unto them." Thus did she display the sincerity of her faith by the purity of her works, for which her name is recorded as a distinguished memorial in different parts of the Holy Scriptures.

Amidst the great destruction which overwhelmed Jericho, Rahab was saved as a brand from the burning, and together with her family she became a branch of the stock of Israel; so that this remarkable history may be justly considered as a beautiful illustration of that promise which was made by our divine Joshua, when he sent forth his messengers to announce the kingdom of heaven: "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." Matt. x. 42.

MARCH THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

THE DIVINE LEADER.

Joshua, v. 14.—*And he said, Nay, but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come.*

NOTHING short of Divine power could have put the children of Israel in possession of the promised land; for though their numbers were great, and the terror of them was spread very generally among the Canaanites, yet the vast population of the country, and the strength of its fortresses, presented insuperable obstacles against a body of invaders, unused to extensive warlike operations, and incapable of laying regular siege to cities which were, in the language of Scripture, "fenced up to heaven." Deut. ix. 1.

Consummate as the abilities of Joshua were, even Jericho would have baffled all his skill and the utmost valour of his troops, by the height of its walls and the care that was taken to guard every avenue of approach, so that none could go out or come in, after the miraculous passage of the people over Jordan. The slightest acquaintance with ancient history will be sufficient to show in what a precarious situation the army of Israel was placed when it lay in an open plain before a frontier town strongly fortified, and enjoying every natural means of defence, surrounded also by several formidable tribes, whose interest it was to prevent its fall, and who were all of them on their own account particularly hostile to the besiegers. While Joshua was occupied in observing the works of Jericho, he perceived an armed man with a drawn sword in his hand. There must have been something very uncommon in this appearance, otherwise the mere sight of a single person in such an attitude had nothing in it so remarkable as to draw the attention of the general from his post.

much less of inducing him to leave his camp for the purpose of holding an intercourse with the stranger. Had Joshua been merely desirous of knowing the man and his business, he could have been satisfied just as well by sending out a party to secure him; and that he did not adopt this obvious course, implies a persuasion in his mind that the object before him was more than human. From the whole account it is evident that the commander of Israel was uncommonly eager in his attention previous to this manifestation; for the phrase of lifting up the eyes, denotes the utmost stretch of anxiety, and a solicitous looking out for some particular person or occurrence. Now what Joshua was at this time expecting, and stood most in need of, may be gathered from the promise which he heard delivered to Moses many years before in the mount: "Behold, I send an angel before thee to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him. But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. For mine angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off." Exodus, xxiii. 20—23. The people of God were now arrived on the very spot where this prediction was to be fulfilled; and as a pledge of its performance, the waters of the river, like those of the Red Sea, were divided to give them an entrance, while the manna on which they had so long fed ceased the very morning after they did eat of the old corn of the land. Here then it was natural for Joshua to be greatly desirous of his coming, without whom it would be vain to attempt a conquest, which depended wholly

upon the Divine interposition. It had been declared more than once that an angel should be sent for this purpose, but none of that order had as yet appeared; and this may well account for the eagerness of Joshua, the intensity of his observation, and his alacrity in going forth alone to address the person that stood between the camp and the city. Some difficulty, however, may be supposed to arise from the manner in which he accosted the unknown warrior, "Art thou for us or our adversaries?" A question like this, it may be said, he would hardly have put if he had conceived the person before him to be super-human; for of such an one he had no reason to form any apprehension.

But Joshua could not be more firmly persuaded of the existence of good angels than of evil ones; and though he was earnestly waiting for one of the celestial hierarchy, yet he knew also, in the language of the Apostle, that he had to "contend against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Ephes. vi. 12. The distinction between the benevolent and malignant spirits was well understood at that period; for the opposing angel who resisted the progress of Balaam, is said to have stood as Satan against him; and in the history of Job, undoubtedly of far higher antiquity than the time of Joshua, the rebel leader of the fallen host is characterized in strong and terrible colours. The appearance then of a supernatural being in the front of Israel, might well excite some doubt at first in the mind of the general whether this vision was that of their predicted leader, or an attempt to intimidate the armies of the living God by their inveterate adversary. Taking the subject in this light, nothing could be more significant than the inquiry of Joshua, or expressive than the answer of the Divine visitant; but in any other the whole will be rendered obscure and

perplexing, for at this time the Israelites were in a hostile country, without a single ally, and neither seeking nor appearing desirous of human succours. Who this captain of the host of Jehovah was, remains to be considered; for though an angel was both repeatedly promised, and anxiously expected, certainly more than an angel was here. The very appellation by which he distinguished himself convinced Joshua of his absolute Divinity, which became confirmed by the command to "loose the shoes from off his feet, because the place whereon he stood was holy." Here then was unequivocally the great Inhabitant of the fire that involved the bush in Horeb, at which time he proclaimed his ineffable name as the self-existent and eternal God to Moses. The same Majesty that was in this flaming Schechinah, and afterwards in the pillar of cloud and fire, now became embodied in the human or angelical form to the view of Joshua. There is a scene in the visions of Daniel which fully illustrates and explains this portion of sacred history, by showing that there are spiritual powers opposed to each other, and by declaring the dignity of Him who is here called the Captain of the host of Jehovah. "Then there came again and touched me one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me, and said, O man, greatly beloved, fear not; peace be unto thee; be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my Lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me. Then said he, Knowest thou wherefore I come unto thee? and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Græcia shall come. But I will show that which is noted in the Scripture of Truth: and there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince." Dan. x. 18—23. This wonderful Personage, who is above all principalities and powers, was

no other than the Messiah, of whom the Apostle says, that "He thought it not robbery to be equal with GOD" (Philip. ii. 6); a description which exactly corresponds to the name of "the great Prince who standeth up for the children of his people." Dan. xii. 1. Now as Israel never had more than one divine ruler or shepherd, the prince spoken of by Daniel could be no other than the mighty Being who made himself known to Moses by the appellation of I AM THAT I AM; who afterwards conducted the people through the wilderness, and who appeared unto Joshua as captain of the host. Whatever was the form, the divinity which it veiled became perceptible only by the words and the miracles, that clearly indicated the present Deity. He whom no man hath seen, nor can see, did indeed hold personal communication with his servants of old; but then it was always under such appearances as were adapted to the strengthened faculties of the favoured beholders, who saw the Schechinah, which, however glorious, was after all nothing more, as the word imports, than a mere tabernacle. Every such visible display represented another still more illustrious that was to come; and all the circumstances attending the one, prefigured the events that were to characterize the other. Thus the revelation to Joshua shadowed the incarnation of the eternal Word; and as the vision was made for the encouragement and support of Israel in the promised land, so "Jesus was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Heb. ii. 9, 10.

MARCH THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

THE TRESPASS OF ACHAN.

Joshua, vii. 26.—*So the Lord turned from the fierceness of his anger: wherefore the name of that place was called The Valley of Achor unto this day.*

THERE is hardly any vice more strongly reprobated in the Scriptures than covetousness; which is classed among the worst corruptions that can debase the human heart, and is even repeatedly called idolatry and uncleanness. The royal Psalmist, when he draws the character of the impious oppressor, represents him as having only one favourite, and that is “the covetous whom God abhorreth;” the reason of which alliance is assigned in the description of the principal; “the wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God.—God is not in all his thoughts.” Ps. x. 3, 4. Such an one then sees in his associate a disposition congenial to his own; a mind set upon the world, and utterly regardless of the means by which its ends may be promoted. Many instances are recorded in the Sacred History of the effects produced by this baneful passion, and of the judgments inflicted upon those who have abandoned themselves to its influence. One of these examples occurred soon after the entrance of Israel into the promised land; and the punishment, however terrible it may appear, was not only necessary in the peculiar circumstances of that people, but became indispensable for the vindication of the Divine honour. By the most solemn adjudication the city of Jericho, with the single exception of Rahab’s family, was devoted to destruction; and all the silver and gold, the vessels of brass and iron, were appropriated to the service of the sanctuary. As the fall of this place was accomplished by the immediate hand of the Almighty,

so he had an exclusive right to all that it contained ; and he gave the Israelites this injunction to convince them that nothing but entire obedience to his laws could ensure them final success, and to express, by a terrible sign, his abomination of those iniquities which had brought so heavy a doom upon the former inhabitants. In executing this decree, the chosen people were taught to consider themselves as mere instruments of the Divine justice ; any desire then on their part to save what God had condemned, would have been at least a seditious wish and moral defilement, amounting to an indirect charge of tyranny against his government, and a preference of the Canaanitish corruptions to his service. All Israel knew the nature of the tenure by which the land was to be obtained, and the possession of it secured. The law, also, relating to vows and the devoting of things to God, was equally explicit and generally understood ; so that no one could be ignorant of his duty, or be guilty of secreting any of the spoils of Jericho without being conscious, at the same time, that he was committing sacrilege. But that every member of this great community was well acquainted with the Divine mandate, is plain, because all were required to bring to the treasury what they found ; and the fact becomes more evident, if possible, from the circumstance that only one person in so great a number was found guilty of breaking the law.

The history of Achan is not a little remarkable, and it certainly is abundantly instructive. He belonged to one of the principal families in the tribe of Judah, was possessed of considerable property, and appears to have been somewhat advanced in years. On all these accounts it might have been supposed that such a man was in no danger of falling into an offence, from the temptation to which he seemed exempted by his age and circumstances, connexions and reputation. But in truth, so far is covetousness from

being peculiar to any period or condition of life, that it increases as possessions enlarge, and becomes more rapacious as the season of hope and enjoyment is contracted. The poor are apt to envy the lot of those above them, and to repine at what they deem an unequal distribution of worldly good ; but all this may proceed from misconception, and the want of knowing what cares and evils are the usual concomitants of wealth and power. But however blameable this discontent may be, it is dust in the balance when compared with the inordinate desires of those who, having already enough for the reasonable purposes of life, are anxious to heap up earthly riches, though they know not who shall gather them. Such persons act as if the happiness of man's life consisted in the abundance of things possessed by him ; and not at all in the manner of his using them. Their minds are evidently under the control of no other principle than that of swelling the sum of present felicity with as little trouble and inconvenience as possible to themselves, and without the slightest regard to the labour and sufferings of others. Nay, so far are they from considering the injury sustained by individuals, that even the public interest will be sacrificed by them at the hazard of national destruction, provided their wicked views are gratified. Thus Achan, when he fixed his affections upon the Babylonish garment, the silver and the gold, thought little or nothing of the mischief that might ensue from his purloining those things. Yet with all his cunning and self-gratulation the man was neither made richer nor happier by his pelf, which he was obliged to hide in the earth to prevent its being discovered. This is one of the blessings which the increase of wealth brings to the covetous person, especially if it be badly acquired, that it makes him fearful of its security. All the satisfaction he can derive from the addition to his store, is, by reflecting on the growth

of his treasure and calculating its produce, comparing his fortune with that of others, and trusting that the whole lies safe from the grasp of men, not more wicked perhaps than himself. But careful as Achan was of his plunder, and sure as he thought it now was from all search, he had forgotten one Observer in the midst of his iniquity, and the experience of many years failed of bringing to his recollection the obvious truth, "that the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." Prov. xv. 3. That a man who had witnessed so many miracles should have acted as if he thought it possible to elude detection and escape judgment, in a matter which so nearly affected the Divine honour, affords a striking proof that virtuous education, and continued good instruction, aided by practical knowledge and the force of example, will be insufficient to preserve the heart from temptation, without regular prayer and habitual watchfulness. Achan no sooner set his eyes upon the ornaments and riches of Jericho, than the desire of possessing them entered his mind; and the opportunity being favourable, he eagerly seized it, thus perpetrating a deed at which a few hours before he would probably have shuddered, retorting upon his friendly monitor the language of another self-deceiver: "But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" This teaches us the necessity of guarding the thoughts and senses against impressions which, however harmless they may at first seem, will sink deep by suffering, and spread so rapidly as to receive at last every kind of iniquity with greediness.

The trespass of Achan being a national concern, could be expiated only by the most exemplary punishment, of which all Israel and the family of the offender were obliged to be witnesses. They who think that the magnitude of the judgment exceeded the enormity of the crime, must form their con-

clusions from very erroneous views of moral turpitude ; and it is to be feared they have themselves but little abhorrence of sin. Achan's offence was complicated, being a robbery of the public treasury, to which the stolen property ought to have been conveyed ; it was followed by dissimulation, or the denial that any spoils had fallen into his hands ; and above all, it was an act of gross impiety against God, and an injury to his government, as the King of Israel. Now as the Almighty is not bound to comply with our rules in the distribution of good, so neither is he to be accountable for his judgments upon those who violate his laws and insult his dignity ; whether, like Achan, they suffer by an express statute, or, like Ananias and Sapphira, they fall down dead, by a stroke of heaven, in the midst of the congregation.

MARCH THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

THE RESCUE OF GIBEON.

Joshua, x. 14.—*And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man : for the Lord fought for Israel.*

OF the various miracles recorded in the history of God's people after their deliverance from bondage, none has produced more observation than that wrought by the ministry of Joshua when he fought against the confederated kings of Canaan in defence of the Gibeonites. Israel had been deceived into this alliance by an artifice which could impose only upon persons unacquainted with political craft ; so true is the saying, " that the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of

light." Luke, xvi. 8. Most men would have considered such a covenant as void of all obligation, on discovering the fraud which had been used to obtain it; but the princes of Israel were actuated by nobler sentiments, and Joshua, when the distressed people applied to him for assistance, instantly mustered his forces and marched to their relief. This was a more arduous enterprize than any in which he had been hitherto engaged, for all the Amorites in the mountainous country were combined to overwhelm Gibeon, for having deserted the common cause. Now, besides considering this as a favourable opportunity to get rid of an unpopular and troublesome connexion, he might have reasonably excused himself from taking the part of men, who by their conduct had shown themselves unworthy of his confidence. But instead of reproving them for their deception, or hesitating to inquire what was the most prudent course to be adopted, Joshua proceeded at once to the rescue of this new branch of God's family, though they were no more than "hevers of wood and drawers of water."

The prompt resolution of Joshua was distinguished by the Divine approbation, for the Captain of the host of Jehovah appeared unto him when he went forth against the five associated kings, and said, "Fear them not, for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee." Such a declaration must be sufficient, one should think, to account for the wonderful events that followed, even though the history of this memorable day had not been concluded with the explanatory remark, that "the Lord fought for Israel." According to his promise, he gave victory to his people; but what seems very extraordinary is the circumstance that the Lord showered great stones upon the fugitives, by which it is said that more perished than by the swords of their pursuers. This

visible interposition of the Divine Power, which in some respects resembled the judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah, was an awful demonstration to the Canaanites, that by attempting to oppose the establishment of Israel they were guilty of rebellion against the Sovereign of heaven and earth. Many instances have occurred of the fall of large metallic substances from the clouds, some of which were precipitated with so much violence as to penetrate deeply into the earth. Now the same Almighty Being who gave birth to the universe, and fixed its laws, dividing and regulating the forms and qualities of bodies, could as easily cause an immense number of these meteoric stones to descend at once, as suffer a few single ones to fall occasionally in different parts of the globe. A shower so dreadful as this, must not only have produced great destruction among the Amorites, but also astonishing effects upon the atmosphere, which may in part account for the miracle that followed, when Joshua said, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies." As the design of the Scriptures is to convey the most important information in a short compass, the language is rather adapted to make religious truths plain to the popular understanding, than to impart correct notions of the phenomena of nature. Such a familiar mode of expression was indeed essentially necessary to the general benefit; for had philosophical precision and correctness been regarded, much of the history would have appeared very obscure to the great body of readers, and contrary to the evidence of their senses. Even those persons who are most profoundly skilled in mathematical science, are obliged to depart from astronomical accuracy in their ordinary conversation upon matters connected with their favourite pursuits:

and the publications which give regular predictions of the celestial revolutions, describe them according to their appearance, and not as they are in reality. Thus they speak of the rising and setting of the sun, his path in the heavens, ascension and declination, as if these terms properly expressed what actually happens, though the calculators know, and their readers too, that the phraseology has become legitimate only by custom, and in conformity to vulgar apprehension. When, therefore, it is said that "the sun stood still over Gibeon, and the moon stayed in the valley of Ajalon," we cannot suppose that those luminaries became absolutely stationary and vertical to those places, but only that they appeared to be so to the Canaanites, who thus saw a superior Power over-ruling their principal deities, and converting them into tremendous portents of destruction to their infatuated worshippers. Whether the miracle was effected by the stoppage of the earth's diurnal motion, or by preternatural refractions arising from the alteration previously produced in the atmosphere, the whole must have spread universal consternation among the heathen, while it strengthened the confidence of the Israelites and confirmed the faith of their new converts.

It is a great mistake to suppose that the intent of the prodigy was merely to afford light sufficient for the purpose of enabling the victors to complete their slaughter, since the battle appears to have been fought early in the day, and in the summer solstice; so that such a change could not be at all necessary for the success of Joshua. The miracle was of higher import, serving to display the folly of the pagan worship, and to proclaim the majesty of the true God, who by these wonders called the Canaanites to submission and repentance. These people were well acquainted with the mighty deliverance of the seed of Jacob, and of the promise on which they

rested their claim to this land. The miraculous passage of the river Jordan, and the downfall of the royal cities of Jericho and Ai, gave an evident assurance that this promise should be accomplished, in spite of all opposition; yet the infatuated inhabitants, with the exception of the men of Gibeon, set themselves to counteract the counsels of Heaven. They now, therefore, beheld the very elements and their presiding divinities, declaring the same great truth, but all proved ineffectual; for the northern states of Canaan, undismayed by the fate of their neighbours, assembled their forces, "and went out, they and all their hosts with them, much people, even as the sand that is upon the sea-shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many. And they pitched together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel." Given up to a blind obduracy of heart, like Pharaoh, these kings, relying upon the superiority of numbers, were resolved to maintain an impious war in defence of their country and religion, though they knew that the word of prophecy had otherwise disposed of the one, and recent events had fully shown the imbecility and vanity of their idols. Formidable as these combined armies were, Joshua at the Divine command marched against them, and by a terrible defeat effected the entire conquest of the country: "which he gave for an inheritance unto Israel, according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war." Josh. xi. 23. The whole of this history is emblematic of that great victory which we obtain over our deadly enemies, through faith in Christ; and all the circumstances that distinguished the progress of Israel from Egypt to their settlement in Canaan, represented the various stages of the eternal redemption wrought out for us by the Captain of our salvation, who was made perfect through suffering. As the rescue of Gibeon was marked by the visible

manifestation of the Divine agency in the descent of great stones from heaven, and the supernatural suspension of the solar and lunar lights in the hemisphere ; so when the true Joshua was in the height of his conflict with the powers of darkness, the sun was eclipsed for the space of three hours ; the rocks rent and the graves were opened : when, therefore, " the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God." Matt. xxvii. 54.

MARCH THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

THE RESOLUTION OF JOSHUA.

Joshua, xxiv. 15.—*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

THIS was the pious declaration of Joshua at a general meeting of the heads of Israel, convened to hear his last exhortations, and to establish by a public act their religious profession. In a former assembly the veteran chief, after enumerating the benefits which distinguished this nation as God's peculiar inheritance, pointed out with equal force the necessity of preserving his favour by keeping themselves apart from the Canaanites and their corruptions. Between the first and second convention there seems to have been a considerable interval, to give the representatives of the people sufficient time for reflection, and ample opportunities for consultation with their respective tribes and families. On their next appearance at Shechem Joshua recapitulated the history of the Divine mercies, from the days of Abraham to the final accomplishment of the promise, as far as related to the temporal settlement of the

chosen seed in the good land, which had been assured by repeated engagements to their fathers. The Almighty having fulfilled his covenant, it was now proper that the people should make an open confession of their faith, either by swearing allegiance to the Sovereign who had done such great things for them, and thus binding themselves to his service, or, by rejecting so reasonable an obligation, show that they preferred the heathen worship to that of Jehovah. This proceeding was also rendered necessary by the change which was about to take place in the government of Israel, through the death of Joshua. As that great man had no successor, the people, without such a bond of union, would have been in danger of losing all their civil and religious distinctions, by mingling with the nations around them, and adopting their most offensive manners. Thus the great intent of separating Israel from the other families of the earth would have failed, and the promise of the Messiah, which had hitherto descended in a pure stream and regular channel from the fountain, must have been lost in the confused and fluctuating mass of vague traditions and uncertain relations. Over this discordant confluence of truth and error, the spirit of man, in future ages, would have wandered in endless perplexity, unable to discover the least ground of hope or vestige by which to guide its inquiries after peace and immortality. Joshua, then, like a wise and good man, tenderly solicitous for the welfare of the community immediately under his charge, as well as of their children, was anxious to bring Israel into a new and solemn covenant with Jehovah, by which alone the temporal happiness of this people could be effectually secured, and the sacred trust committed to them be faithfully preserved and transmitted to posterity.

But whatever might be the decision of the great national council on this most important concern,

Joshua took care to settle his family in the principles of truth; and though he left the elders to form their resolutions, without exerting any influence upon them, he thought it right to state explicitly what were his own: "If," said he, "it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood; or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." The Israelites were here dealt with as free agents, for the Almighty will have none but such to worship him, as he regards no other service than that of the heart, nor doth he accept any offering but that which proceeds from a willing mind. The determination of Joshua was the result of devout meditation; and as he spoke not only for himself, but his whole family, it must also have been the expression of mature and well-digested deliberation, combining the virtuous intentions of youthful zeal with the enlarged experience and fixed judgment of aged piety. Joshua did not exactly know the sentiments of all the other houses in Israel, but he could speak with entire confidence of his own, and his declaration exhibits a beautiful picture of domestic harmony, formed by early education and cherished by the habitual offices of devotion.

It was doubtless a matter of supreme satisfaction to this venerable leader, that in an affair of such magnitude he could rely with full assurance upon the religious integrity of persons who were most nearly allied to him; and that however apprehensive he might be of the national apostacy, he should at least leave those behind him who with unshaken firmness and ardent affection would continue to serve the Lord. A richer spring of consolation than this, next to the enjoyment of Divine grace, cannot possibly be conceived; for what can equal the pleasure arising

from the sense of having discharged our duty towards those, in the well-being of whom we are most interested, and to find that our sedulous attention and labours are repaid by their improvement in knowledge and increase in virtue? If pure felicity is to be found in this world, it must be in the enjoyment of a household like that of Joshua, united in affection to each other, animated by the same spirit of filial duty, and co-operating with equal fervour to promote the Divine glory in their generation. Such a circle, wherever found, resembles heaven here below, and the influence of its members will extend beyond their own immediate sphere. From the language of Joshua we may infer that Israel was already contaminated by idolatrous connexions; but the exhortation of their venerable commander, and the example of his family, produced so powerful an effect upon the assembly, that with one consent they entered into a covenant, saying, "The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey." The aged general having recorded this engagement in the book of the law, set up a memorial of it under an oak in Shechem, and then withdrew from his public labours to the bosom of retirement and tranquillity, where he finished his course not long after, full of years and crowned with glory. An apocryphal writer, in an eulogy on the character of Joshua, says, "according to his name he was made great for the saving of the elect of God, and taking vengeance of the enemies that rose up against them, that he might set Israel in their inheritance. How great glory gat he when he did lift up his hands, and stretched out his sword against the cities! Who before him stood so to it? For the Lord brought his enemies unto him. Did not the sun go back by his means? And was not one day as long as two? He called upon the most high Lord when the enemies pressed upon him on every side, and the great Lord heard him. And

with hailstones of mighty power he made the battle to fall violently upon the nations, and in the descent he destroyed them that resisted, that the nations might know all their strength, because he fought in the sight of the Lord, and he followed the MIGHTY ONE." *Ecclus. xlv. 1—6*. It would be difficult to describe with equal perspicuity the character of the leader of Israel, and that of the Divine Person of whom he was so illustrious a type. Their names, as the son of Sirach has truly stated, are the same, denoting in both languages a saviour; and it should likewise be added, one that is self-existent. Jehovah was personally with Joshua, as his director, and by whom were wrought all the wonders which distinguished the settlement of the chosen seed in the promised land. But the same essential glory was truly united to the humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, for the purpose of bringing in everlasting righteousness, and enabling penitent and believing sinners to overcome their spiritual enemies. Moses brought the Israelites to the borders of Canaan, but he was not suffered to conduct them into the inheritance, being obliged to leave that gracious office to his ministering servant. Thus in the fulness of time God sent forth his Son, made under the law, that we being redeemed from bondage might receive the adoption of sons (*Gal. iv. 4, 5*); and as Joshua, when he subdued the land, divided it among the tribes, so our Divine Saviour, after his victory over death and him that had the power of it, gave this authority to his disciples: "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." *Matt. xxviii. 19, 20*.

MARCH THE TWENTY-NINTH.

DEBORAH AND BARAK.

Judges, iv. 4, 5.—*And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. And she dwelt under the palm-tree of Deborah, between Ramah and Beth-el, in Mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.*

WHEN Joshua died, the Israelites were left without any particular chief, all the tribes being united under the immediate dominion of Jehovah, who suffered some of the old inhabitants to remain, that they might be the instruments of proving the integrity of his people, and of punishing them when they fell from their allegiance. In all this we have a lively picture of the church, and of the conflict which she has to sustain against her enemies; for as the heathen nations were not entirely subdued in Canaan, so neither in the spiritual warfare are the corruptions of our old nature utterly destroyed, though Divine Grace gives us the superiority over them so long as we maintain our faith unshaken, and keep close in the line of religious duty. Many infirmities will remain even in the most mortified minds, and some unruly passions will continue to exercise their patience and humility, and to call for perpetual watchfulness and self-denial. The redeemed family, during its probationary state, must unavoidably be liable to errors which, under some form or other, will intrude themselves to the disturbance of its peace and the occasional triumph of the enemy, till the great Householder shall cause the tares and the wheat to be eternally separated from each other. Thus Israel represented not only the militant church, but every true member of that holy community. When the

chosen seed forsook God and his worship for the idols of the country, and the abominations which had brought down the Divine vengeance upon the seven nations of Canaan, then those which remained gained the ascendancy over them, and, without regarding their apostacy, ruled them with a rod of iron. Still the goodness of God did not forsake his inheritance, but even in their sin and misery he waited to be gracious unto them on their repentance; and when they turned to him with deep contrition, he raised up persons in an extraordinary manner for their deliverance, that both they and all the nations around might acknowledge him to be the only Sovereign of heaven and earth. If it appears surprising that a people enjoying such uncommon privileges, and who had witnessed so many miracles, should fall into idolatrous practices, and form connexions with those who hated them; let us cease from wondering at Israel, and look into ourselves. Though we cannot be accused of open profanation, of any direct renunciation of the faith, yet how readily do we yield up our affections to the corruptions of the world, and at the clamorous sound of our appetites fall down and worship some vile image which pride, avarice, or intemperance may set up in our vain and foolish hearts? But have these delusions produced that satisfaction, which in the eagerness of pursuit we promised ourselves from the enjoyment of them? On the contrary, has not every deviation from the path of rectitude, and from the pure simplicity of Divine instruction, involved us in the mazes of doubt and perplexity, the snares of temptation and the tyranny of remorse? If we have been mercifully brought out of such a state, and once more restored to the tranquillity of conscience and the assurance of hope, an impartial examination of our minds, and an accurate investigation of occurrences, will convince us, that to the good providence of God alone are we indebted for this emancipation from a slavery into

which we fell by our folly, and from which we could not have escaped by our own wisdom. Diseases and disappointment are frequently made the ministers of the Divine counsel to the heart, and sometimes even new and more heinous transgressions become the means of scourging the sinner into a sense of his folly and ingratitude. This was the case with the Israelites of old, who in prosperity were wanton and perverse; but when affliction came upon them, then they cried unto the Lord and sought his favour with humiliation. On their repentance he sent messengers to instruct them in the way of righteousness, and to save them from oppressors: but these inspired persons were for the most part such as worldly policy would have slighted, and even treated with contempt. When the children of Israel had long groaned under the yoke of Moab, the Lord gave them a deliverer who was left-handed; but after the death of this judge the people fell into their old practices, in consequence of which the Divine protection was withdrawn from them, and they became the vassals of Jabin king of Canaan. Near twenty years did they endure this tyranny, without being brought by their sufferings to any proper sense of the iniquity which had drawn them into so great a misery. This obduracy depicts with melancholy exactness the insensibility of the human heart, which is generally thoughtless of miseries in the season of ease and enjoyment, and unmindful of its errors and ingratitude when the scene is changed and those miseries are taken away. At length the weight of oppression was so intolerable, that the children of Israel cried unto the Lord against whom they had rebelled, and his spirit visited them once more for their direction and comfort in the time of trouble. But the chosen messenger was neither one of the elders whose years and experience entitled him to universal respect and obedience, nor an active and enterprising warrior by whom the people might readily be roused to revolt.

It was the design of Providence to confound the wisdom of the wise, who had given themselves up to folly in leading Israel astray, and to show that valour was useless unless strengthened and conducted by a superior power. Accordingly the spirit of judgment rested upon Deborah the wife of Lapidoth, and the work of deliverance was completed by the hands of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite. How long Deborah ministered to the afflicted people before she called Barak to be her coadjutor, does not appear from the history; but even in the narrative, concise as it is, we observe that the children of Israel acknowledged her authority, and were accustomed to come up to her for instruction. Nothing shows a right disposition of the heart towards God more forcibly than a willing attention to the monitions which he sends, however sharp may be the rebuke or lowly the minister. In their pride and prosperity, the Israelites would probably have persecuted Deborah, and have set at nought her counsels; but in this time of their affliction they gladly received the word of the Lord from her lips, and came up to her for judgment. So they who turn their backs upon the church, and heed not the heavenly voice speaking in all her offices, when the vanities of the world call them another way; are eager enough to seek for her consolations in the hour of sickness and danger. When they are oppressed by the remembrance of sin, and cannot escape from the bitterness of it, then they will gladly hear the word of reproof which formerly excited their resentment, and will earnestly seek for those directions which they once contemned as the fearful dreams of age or the extravagant flights of enthusiasm. No sooner were the Israelites brought to repentance, than God sent them a messenger; and when through her ministry they became thoroughly penitent and submissive to his dispensations, he commissioned Barak to lead them victoriously against their enemies. But brave and

pious as this man was, he felt some reluctance to undertake the charge, and said to Deborah, "If thou wilt go with me, then I will go : but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go." Now as Barak is enrolled by the Apostle among the worthies, who "by faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, and obtained promises;" his backwardness could neither have proceeded from the want of courage nor of zeal : and yet we find Deborah thus reproving him, "I will surely go with thee ; notwithstanding, the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour : for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hands of a woman." Barak did not decline the enterprise, or call in question the command which he received, but his hesitation implied some doubt of the means by which the great work was to be accomplished ; and he seems to have thought that the presence of Deborah was necessary to inspire his troops. The heroism of this extraordinary woman was equally conspicuous with her other eminent qualities ; for when she knew that Sisera had gathered all his chariots and a prodigious number of forces, to overwhelm Israel, she said to Barak, "Up, for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand : is not the Lord gone out before thee ?" Such was the lofty and dignified language of Deborah ; and the obedience of Barak corresponded to the energy of the prophetess, for he hastened down from Tabor with his handful of men, and so completely discomfited the numerous army of Sisera, that not one of them was left to accompany his flying commander, who fell by the arm of a female, not of the tribes of Israel, though impelled to the deed by a sense of their wrongs, and acting by a divine commission, otherwise it would not have been said, "Blessed above women shall she be in the tent."

MARCH THE THIRTIETH.

THE SONG OF DEBORAH.

Judges, v. 31.—*So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.*

IN this animated strain of pious exultation concludes the triumphal ode sung in concert by Deborah and Barak, accompanied most probably by a train of joyful Israelites in procession to the altar, after their signal deliverance from the oppression of Jabin king of Canaan. Though obscure in some parts, which unavoidably arises from the antiquity of the composition, and the very character of eastern poetry, this choral song is rich and elegant in description, and full of important instruction. The piece opens with calling upon the leaders and people who offered themselves willingly in the war, to bless Jehovah, the God of Israel. From this we learn, that however ready the Lord may be to help those who put their trust in him; he expects also that they should enter with willing minds into his service, and exert themselves openly and stedfastly against his and their enemies. He neither delights in the prayers, nor will accept the offerings of those who have been indifferent to his cause in the season of trial and contest, of rebuke and blasphemy. The prophetess having arrested the attention of high and low, princes and people, proceeds to describe the majesty of Jehovah when he delivered them from their Egyptian bondage, and made a covenant with them in the wilderness. By being thus reminded of former mercies, and the nature of their solemn relation to the Author of them, the people were led to consider their late affliction as the consequence of disobedience; and the deliverance just experienced, as the

returning favour of God on their repentance. The whole scope of the hymn was to make the nation sensible that all which befell them, whether in judgment or mercy, came directly from Him who had chosen them for his own, and that, let the instruments of punishment be ever so strong, or those of deliverance ever so feeble and contemptible, they were appointed for special purposes, and could execute nothing more than what he permitted and directed to be done. This is the obvious signification of that passage which has strangely perplexed the commentators, where the inspired conductors of the song describe the beneficial effects of the great victory obtained by their means, and inculcate at the same time an admirable lesson upon the rulers, the warriors, and the people at large, how to improve the blessing they had received. "Speak ye that ride upon white asses, ye who sit upon the seat of judgment, and ye also who travel the highways; talk of him with the voice of thanksgiving. Let those who come armed to the watering-places, show forth the righteous acts of Jehovah, and the righteousness of the villages in Israel; then shall the people go down to the gates." While those in authority and the public instructors were thus taught their duty, an indirect accusation was brought against them of having neglected it in times past, and to which it was owing that "when war was in the gates, there was not a shield seen nor a spear found amongst forty thousand in Israel." Now, therefore, since the Lord had so manifestly displayed his power and goodness in rescuing the lot of his inheritance from the yoke of tyranny, the rulers were charged to make an open and constant profession of their faith, and to show forth a good conversation, by way of example, as that which would effectually produce a general reformation, an habitual love of holiness, and such a spirit of true courage as would enable the people to

“meet their enemies fearlessly in the gates.” From exhortation the prophetess descends to expatiate on the conduct of those tribes which were most actively engaged in the war, and to mark in indelible characters of reproach those that criminally sat at their ease during the great contest, when the religion and liberties of Israel were at stake. But the principal beauty of this charming poem lies in the minute description of the ignominious fall of Sisera, the anxiety of his mother, and the vain consolations of her wise ladies, anticipating a triumph over the daughters of Israel. “Have they not vanquished,” said these women of Canaan, looking out from the battlements of their castle for the approach of Sisera and his conquering host, “have they not divided the prey, to every man a damsel or two? to Sisera, a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needle-work, of divers colours of needle-work on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil!” Upon this lively picture a very pious writer has the following excellent observations:—“How soft, how exquisitely just a description have we here of a mother longing for the return of her beloved son; nay, impatient not only to see him safe, and crowned with victory, but loaded with spoils! The spoils too are such, as most affected a female passion; damsels to set off the pomp and splendour of her retinue; ‘vests of ‘needle-work of divers colours,’ and curiously wrought on both sides, to adorn her person. This was the booty she expected; this the gaudy prey she longed to see, as well as to behold her son returning in triumph from the battle. How very natural are these sentiments! The tenderness of a mother on the one hand; the foible and vanity of the female breast on the other! How very aply applied by a woman, to one of her own sex; to the mother of Sisera, by a mother in Israel! With what lively touches of art and nature is this picture of maternal

Love, impatience, and female curiosity, embellished and set off to heighten the distress of the disappointment that was soon to happen, on the unexpected tidings of a total defeat and shameful death!—Let this teach us not to set our hearts on any worldly expectations; the higher we raise our hopes and desires of such uncertain prospects, the more grievous, and generally the more certain, will the disappointment be; especially if such objects be sinful and displeasing to God. But his church, and all that place their trust in him, shall not be disappointed of their hope; but after all their troubles and afflictions have cause to join, in concert with our holy prophetess, in this triumphant song, and even to conclude with her, when they see the destruction of the wicked, that is, their spiritual enemies, and say, ‘So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord; but let them that love Him, be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might *.’”

MARCH THE THIRTY-FIRST.

GIDEON'S FLEECE.

Judges, vi. 39, 40.—*And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece: let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.*

THE history of Israel is the narrative of God's dealings with a peculiar people, raised up for special

purposes; and as the several institutions and ordinances belonging to their government had a symbolical allusion, the leading persons and events were of a typical cast and character. Under various forms and circumstances the Sacred Records exhibit the designs and operations of Grace for the redemption of man; and while the careless reader is perplexed by many injunctions and incidents, the serious and inquisitive mind, knowing that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for instruction in righteousness, seeks diligently to discover the hidden meaning and spiritual application of these mysteries. It was common in ancient times, and among the eastern nations, to speak by actions as well as words, or to convey striking lessons of a moral and political nature by significant emblems, the language of which was well understood by those who beheld the performance. The knowledge of divine things was frequently thus communicated, either in parabolical representations, or by the exhibition of real transactions, which not only gave the assurance of promises and denunciations, but figured them under the most lively and expressive images. Of this latter kind was that remarkable scene which encouraged Gideon to undertake the commission assigned to him of delivering his country from the oppressive yoke of Midian. After the defeat of the Canaanites by Barak, the land had rest forty years, during which period we may well suppose that the counsels of Deborah were religiously followed, and the goodness of God gratefully remembered. But ease and prosperity produced a relaxation of manners; and at length the people, unmindful of former mercies, fell into the abominations of the heathen, and "did evil in the sight of the Lord." Having thus rebelled against their Sovereign, by violating his laws and practising the corruptions most offensive to Infinite Holiness, it was just that

the Divine protection should be withdrawn from them, and that they should suffer the consequences of their wickedness. The Midianites, taking advantage of this apostasy, united with Amalek and the people of the East, against the Israelites, who were forced to seek a refuge in the dens and strong-holds of the mountains. So great was the devastation spread by these invaders, that "there was no sustenance left for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass;" and it is added, "that like an army of devouring locusts the spoilers entered the land to destroy it." In this miserable condition, surrounded by inveterate foes, and in danger of perishing by famine, the children of Israel cried unto the Lord; and it merits notice, that no sooner was this the case, than the Lord sent them a prophet. An inspired messenger came, preaching repentance to the people, before a deliverer was appointed to rescue them from their enemies; and this was the usual manner in which the Almighty mercifully visited his ancient inheritance. The order of redemption was strongly shadowed in this process, for when the Sun of Righteousness was about to arise upon the world, which had been long sunk in darkness, the "Prophet of the Highest went before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people, by the remission of their sins." Luke, i. 76, 77. So here, when the Israelites were driven to the utmost extremity, the Lord sent them a prophet, who reminded them of the blessings they had received, and the ungrateful returns which they had made to their God and King. The effects of this discourse are not related, but they may be inferred from the occurrence which immediately followed, when "an Angel of the Lord appeared unto Gideon as he threshed wheat by the wine-press, secretly to hide it from the Midianites. And the Angel of the Lord said unto him, Jehovah is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." Now

that this was not a mere created angel is obvious, because the incommunicable name of Jehovah is given unto him repeatedly throughout the whole history; and the language of the command is such as none but the Supreme Being would have spoken. "And Jehovah looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hands of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" Gideon indeed was well persuaded that he had been favoured with a vision of the Divine Presence, when he erected an altar to commemorate the manifestation, and called it Jehovah Shalom, or God is my Peace. After the departure of this Divine Person, Gideon entered upon his public character, by throwing down the altar of Baal, and destroying the grove belonging to it; which act of religious zeal so provoked his own kindred, that they persecuted him with the greatest malignity, and threatened him with death. The firmness of his father saved Gideon from their fury, and he obtained a new name, descriptive of the high office to which he was called, as the deliverer and reformer of the nation. When the Midianites and their confederates pitched in the valley of Jezreel, menacing the destruction of Israel, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, at whose summons the tribes of Manasseh and Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, gathered their forces and placed them under his command. But successful as he had been in collecting a formidable army, Gideon would not venture to march against the enemy without first consulting the word of the Lord, and receiving a sign of assurance that Israel would be saved by his hand. The name of this general is enrolled in the New Testament among the worthies, who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, and obtained promises; yet we find him seeking for miracles, although Jehovah had said, "Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the

Midianites as one man." But the signs requested, appear rather to have had the public edification for their object than the particular instruction of Gideon.

Being now under the Divine influence, he was led by that to ask for these symbols of success which could not fail to inspire the people with confidence in their leader, and reverence to the authority by which he acted. There was, however, still more in these emblematic predictions than the promise of deliverance to Israel, and the assurance of victory to Gideon. This eminent general represented the Saviour, and the actions performed by him figured that wonderful redemption to which the calling of Israel was introductory, and of which its whole history was a type. Considered in this view, the miraculous signs afforded to Gideon were expressive, not only of the Divine goodness towards his people, but of that grace which in the fulness of time should be diffused over all the earth. The word of life, in scriptural language, is usually called dew, and the Church of God is most commonly described as a flock of sheep, separated from the rest of the world. In the days of Gideon this privilege was confined exclusively to Israel, who enjoyed a revelation, containing the promise of salvation, and ordinances, which characterized its nature, operations, and effects. The first miracle vouchsafed to Gideon, aptly represented this separation of the seed of Jacob, and the peculiar benefits of the Mosaic dispensation, while all other nations wandered in darkness, following the delusions of their own imaginations. So copious was the effusion of dew on this night, that the fleece produced a bowl full of water; which denoted in a most striking image the rich communications made to the Jewish church "at sundry times, and in divers manners, by the prophets." Heb. i. 1.

The inversion of the miracle completed this prophetic picture, by showing the state of that church after the accomplishment of the Divine purposes, by leaving it as a standing memorial of judgment, while the earth around became covered with the grace which Israel despised and rejected. Such was the remote object of this double symbol, which not only yielded particular encouragement to Gideon and his army, but was recorded by the Spirit of truth, "for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." 1 Cor. x. 11.

APRIL THE FIRST.

THE INGRATITUDE OF ISRAEL.

Judges, viii. 34, 35.—*And the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side: neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel.*

THE ingratitude of Israel to their temporal benefactors was equally conspicuous with that which they manifested on most occasions to the Divine Author of all their mercies. One of the most remarkable instances of this evil disposition is related in the public treatment of Gideon's family after the death of that great man, who not only delivered his country when surrounded by inveterate enemies, but refused the highest honours that could be presented to an ambitious mind, when he had secured the national independence. While the sense of what he had done for them was fresh in their minds, the Israelites thought they could not show their esteem

for Gideon more strongly than by placing him at the head of the government, and making the crown hereditary in his line. "Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou and thy son, and thy son's son also ; for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian." However generous and grateful this overture may at first sight appear, it was in fact both extravagant and unjust ; for, much as the people were indebted to the valour and good conduct of Gideon, all the blessings they received by him came from a higher Power. In offering the throne, therefore, to this eminent commander, the elders had strangely forgotten that God was in the strictest sense their legitimate Sovereign, and that to create another monarchy for themselves was to act in direct opposition to his authority. Of this they were reminded by the object of their choice ; for when the proposal was made, " Gideon said, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you : the Lord shall rule over you." Thus it is plain that great as the deliverance of this people was, it failed to produce any effectual change in their hearts, though for some years a respect for Gideon made them outwardly correct in their manners. But when by the death of this venerable leader they were released from the restraint occasioned by his virtues, the children of Israel immediately returned to those abominations, for the practice of which they had formerly suffered the heavy inflictions of Divine vengeance. Having thus lost all sense of their duty to God, it was natural enough that they should forget their obligations to those who had been the instruments of his mercy. There can be no reliance upon the affection and fidelity of men who abuse the Divine goodness by impiety, and who receive the warnings and the blessings of Providence without improvement. Whatever friendship they may pretend, and however ardent may be their professions of gratitude, yet as the whole proceeds from

no purer source than a regard to temporal interest, the stream of affection will be quickly dried up, or directed into another channel, according to the influence of caprice and the change of circumstances. Hence it has often happened, especially in public life, that the same persons who were almost the objects of adoration, have for some trifling causes sunk into obscurity, and been treated with contempt. The foul breath of calumny has dissipated their popularity in a moment, so that the very service which once called forth universal admiration and applause has been turned into matter of complaint and accusation, or failed to ward off the resentment of the fickle multitude, when led away by craft and wickedness. Thus the Israelites would have changed their constitution in honour of Gideon, while the impression of his zeal and patriotism was deep in their minds; but as the offer did not result from that serious and deliberate consideration which is the effect of religious principles, the sentiment of respect was of no long continuance; for when Gideon died, "the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side; neither showed they any kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto Israel." This last iniquity was the necessary consequence of the former, for when the people were so base as to forget what the Almighty had done for them in the time of their calamity, it was in the common course of things that they should be unmindful of his chosen servant, by whom the deliverance had been accomplished. Israel is an accurate representation of the world at large, and a melancholy, but faithful picture of the human heart; for nothing is more common than to see the most liberal acts of kindness received with indifference, and repaid with unthankfulness; while in

the most serious of all concerns, how dead are our affections to Him who came down from heaven that he might save us from hell, and who stooped to the lowest stage of humiliation and misery, to make us partakers of eternal life! Upon a close and careful examination of our past lives, and the turn of our thoughts from day to day, conscience will accuse us of the most unworthy returns for innumerable benefits, and convict us of having slighted that grace which brought in salvation for us when we were without hope, and shut up by our spiritual enemies on every side. The perusal of this history, then, should set us upon a regular survey of our tempers and conduct, that the fervour of zeal may not die for want of exertion, and of that stimulating energy which is produced by reflection. This constant watchfulness over our hearts and review of our actions, will enable us to overcome the snares and temptations to which we are exposed in an evil and perverse generation; and thus shall we avoid falling into that awful state which our Lord has described as being a leading characteristic of "the latter days:—" "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Matt. xxiv. 12.

APRIL THE SECOND.

JEPHTHAH'S VOW.

Judges, xi. 39, 40.—*And it was a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah four days in a year.*

Few relations in the sacred records have occasioned more observation and opposition of sentiment than the history of Jephthah, which has afforded matter of triumph to infidels, and of perplexity to serious

minds. For a long time the stream of commentators increased the difficulty by their laborious explications and strained endeavours to reconcile the rigid interpretation of the narrative, with the principle of natural justice and the law of divine revelation. According to the common construction, in which most of the versions agree, Jephthah, on being called home by his countrymen and appointed their leader, "made a vow unto the Lord, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering." It is from this reading of the vow that all the embarrassment has proceeded, by which a subject, plain and instructive of itself, becomes involved in doubt and shaded with horror. That Jephthah might lawfully make the vow which he did, cannot be questioned, since it is admitted in the story, and for the performance of it he is commended in the New Testament. But if the vow be taken literally as it stands in our own, and most of the other translations, we shall certainly be at a loss to discover either extraordinary piety in the action, or any just reason for the encomium. Though Jephthah was now under the Divine influence, he surely had it not in his power to dispense with any of the statutes which God had expressly enacted for the government of his people. No priest could presume to offer a human sacrifice at the command of Jephthah, and yet if the declaration be taken in the offensive sense which has been put upon it, such must have been the case, unless we are to suppose that the father performed this office himself, thereby adding the profanation of sacrilege to the highest act of inhumanity. If he did not offer his daughter upon the altar, but simply put her to death, as some learned men have main-

tained, then it is plain that he did not fulfill his engagement, by which he was bound to consecrate her to the Divine service. Now, in whatever way the fact be taken, the virgin must have been devoted to the Lord, otherwise the vow of her father was not executed, and consequently he could not justly be praised for his faith. All the writers who have discussed the subject, ancient and modern, agree in this, that the promise was strictly performed, though at the same time they concur in condemning it as being rash and presumptuous. But there is nothing in the story to show that the conduct of Jephthah was at all deserving of this censure; on the contrary, his behaviour from the beginning was that of a man deeply impressed with reverence for the majesty of Jehovah, and animated with an ardent zeal for his glory. Let us take the engagement then as it stands, according to the grammatical order, which a very learned divine has proved to be the legitimate construction of the passage. "If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be that WHATSOEVER cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace, SHALL SURELY BE THE LORD'S, AND I WILL OFFER TO HIM A BURNT OFFERING." By this reading, which is perfectly agreeable to the Hebrew text, all the cloud of uncertainty vanishes at once, and we perceive, what indeed is apparent from the general course of the history, that the declaration of Jephthah consisted of two parts; by the one he pledged himself to devote, or set apart to the Divine use, as the first fruits of his victory, whosoever should meet him from his house; and by the second, to offer a public burnt sacrifice unto God, as an eucharistic service, and for the ratification of his vow. It was certainly a very afflicting circumstance to Jephthah, when in the moment of grateful exultation he first perceived

his only child coming forth with minstrels and dancing to meet him : and he felt the stroke as became an Israelite, to whom the hope of a flourishing family was paramount to every other worldly interest. But by virtue of the solemn obligation under which he was bound, the good man found himself suddenly cut off from the general expectation that the Messiah might arise in his particular line. He was now become as it were an insulated being in the midst of his people, and lay like a wreck upon the strand, in the midst of all the glory by which he was surrounded, as the deliverer of his nation. Jephthah lamented this great calamity, but it did not shake his confidence in God. He mourned over his daughter, but he would not withdraw his promise ; and the child of his affections proved how religiously she had been brought up by her submission to a decree which separated her from all earthly connexions. She desired only a respite of two months, and then her father did with her according to his vow, " and she knew no man." This holy virgin became espoused to a heavenly Bridegroom, and spent the remainder of her days either in or near the sanctuary, a living memorial of the Divine goodness to Israel, of her father's faith, and of her own pious resignation to his will. The daughter of Jephthah, in her secluded state, was a lively picture of the Church, set apart from the rest of the world by a solemn covenant, and sealed and sanctified by the blood of atonement. It was a custom with the daughters of Israel to go up four days every year, not to lament, but to hold an intercourse with this illustrious female ; and doubtless at these public meetings they profited much by her instruction, and were greatly improved by her example. She was then spiritually a mother in Israel, being the means of keeping up, by these annual festivals, a remembrance of what

God had wrought for his people, and of teaching them their obligations and duty to him. From such affecting and interesting assemblies it was hardly possible that the daughters of Israel could return to their familiar connexions and ordinary occupations, without feeling admiration for the exalted virtue they had beheld, and reporting the edifying conversation to which they had been admitted. Thus might be said of Jephthah's daughter, that which is observed concerning the spouse in the mystic song, "Then that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice." Canticles, viii. 13.

APRIL THE THIRD.

THE BIRTH OF SAMSON.

Judges, xiii. 5.—*The child shall be a Nazarite unto GOD from the womb, and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.*

THE connexion between the two great divisions of Divine revelation, resembles that which distinguishes a parable and its interpretation. The subject is the same in both, but with this difference, that in the Old Testament it was shadowed under the various forms of typical circumstances and prophetic delineations, which were not fully comprehended till the mystery was unveiled by the manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh. While the polity of Israel preserved the promise of a Saviour, its history figured the circumstances of his coming; and the prophecies declared from time to time the certainty of his approach, and the particular events by which it would be attended. To the Gospel then we must look for

the sense of the law, and for the explication of those wonderful incidents which are scattered throughout the early records of God's chosen people. Without this key it is impossible to understand the meaning of many things which are related as having happened by the Divine appointment, and under the influence of the Holy Spirit, since the same effects might have been accomplished by means more simple and consonant to the usual process of Divine Providence. The life of Samson, which is drawn out with remarkable precision, and diversified with the narration of uncommon incidents, is one of those portions of Sacred Writ that must be considered as typical to be rendered intelligible and reconcileable to the appointment of Infinite Wisdom. His birth was announced by no less a person than the Angel Jehovah himself, who gave these directions concerning this remarkable child to his mother; "Beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine, nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing; for lo, thou shalt conceive and bear a son, and no razor shall come upon his head; for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." When the Heavenly Intelligence appeared again, in answer to the prayer of Manoah, who, unconscious of his quality, entreated to know his name, he said, "Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is TYPICAL?" for so the word ought to have been rendered, and not *secret*, as it stands in our translation. Samson then was consecrated from the womb by that glorious Being, of whom he was to be an eminent figure in the actions of his life and the manner of his death. As a Nazarite, by the special designation of Heaven, and the only one of that description recorded in the Old Testament, his character was to be peculiar, and in some respects different from the regulations laid down in the law concerning devoted persons. But the prominent

features were the same, though accompanied by some extraordinary manifestations, suited to the great purposes for which he was so wonderfully raised up and set apart from his brethren. It will be proper then, to the right understanding and improvement of this symbolical history, to consider the leading particulars which distinguished the profession of a Nazarite, whether he became such by Divine appointment or by voluntary obligation. Every such person was to keep himself as much as possible from all legal pollution; for being made holy unto the Lord, it was necessary that he should be free from moral defilement; and thus he represented Him "in whom there was no sin, neither was guile found in his lips." 1 Pet. ii. 22.

Besides the watchful care necessary to be observed by the Nazarite to avoid falling into that state of degradation incurred by involuntary uncleanness, he was required to abstain from all strong liquor, and the production of the vine in every shape. Not to enter here into the inquiry whether the interdicted tree in Paradise was of this species, which however is highly probable, the prohibition of its fruit, in the present instance, was intended to show that the person under the influence of this law owed all his powers and qualifications to Divine Grace. A lively figure was here exhibited of the primeval state of man; and it pointed with equal force and instruction to that glorious period, when by the full and perfect obedience of the promised Seed, free access to the tree of life shall be opened to all believers. But the most remarkable circumstance attending this institution was, that of obliging the Nazarite to suffer his hair to grow all the time of his sustaining that character. In the case of Samson we find that his strength increased with his locks, which was a plain indication that all his great qualities proceeded from supernatural causes. So Christ is the head of

the Church, and of every member of it, by virtue of their union with whom, they obtain a continual supply of knowledge and power, which enables them to resist with success their spiritual enemies, and through faith to overcome the world.

The manner in which the birth of Samson was announced, prefigured very exactly that of the Messiah; and therefore to this typical prophecy the evangelical historian seems to refer in his account of the infancy of Jesus; "And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene." Matt. ii. 23.

APRIL, THE FOURTH.

THE VICTORY OF SAMSON.

Judges, xv. 19.—*But God clave a hollow place that was in the rock, and there came water there-out: and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived; wherefore he called the name thereof En-hakkore, which is in Lehi unto this day.*

IN the life of Samson, the first circumstance which indicated his symbolical character was that of setting his affections upon a daughter of the Philistines, to the great surprize of his parents, who knew not that it was part of the Divine decree. This observation furnishes a certain rule for the explication of the typical histories; no incidents having a prophetic tendency but those which were wrought by supernatural power. In all other respects the characters must be judged like those of common persons, while our main attention is directed for edification and instruction in righteousness, to what was expressly

performed in obedience to a heavenly impulse. It is said of Samson, that "the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times;" and the proposed alliance with the family of Timnath was one of those occurrences in which he acted by virtue of that Divine agency. This shadowed the overture of the Gospel to the Gentile world, contrary to the exclusive system and narrow views of the Jewish Church; and as Samson in the prosecution of this marriage was opposed by a lion, which he overcame without any weapon or human assistance, so the Redeemer defeated the malice of Satan, and all the powers that were combined against the purposes of grace. The honey found in the carcase of the animal was a very expressive emblem of that life, which we derive from the incarnation of the Saviour, and his triumph over sin and death. By taking our nature upon him, and submitting to all its infirmities; descending into the invisible world, and rising again from the tomb, he hath given us the assurance of immortality, saying to us as he did to the afflicted sister of Lazarus, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." John, xi. 25, 26. The vengeance taken by Samson on the Philistines, in destroying their fields and vineyards by fire-brands placed between the sheaves of corn, aptly figured the progress of Divine truth, and its ultimate success at the great harvest, when all the systems of corruption and idolatry shall be burnt up, or annihilated as with unquenchable fire. It is painful to observe the degraded state of the Israelites at this period, when three thousand of them could confederate for the purpose of sacrificing their illustrious countryman to the fury of his enemies. But if this treachery excites astonishment, the patience of Samson cannot be contemplated without admiration. Instead of reproaching them

for their ingratitude, or doing them any injury, he received them with meekness, and, suffering himself to be tied with two new cords, was led away by them as a sheep to the slaughter. 'This remarkable instance of forbearance and resignation naturally carries our thought forward to that memorable era when the ungrateful and unbelieving Jews preferred a robber and murderer to the Lord of life. Samson taken from his retirement by his brethren, and conducted as a criminal to the camp of the Philistines, exhibited a prophetic image of the Messiah, seized in the garden, conveyed to the palace of the high-priest, and led bound from thence to the pretorium of the Roman governor, by whom he was condemned to be crucified. But the exultation of the foe, in both cases, was of short duration: for as the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon Samson, at the very moment when his adversaries thought his destruction sure; so Jesus conquered the enemies of our salvation, when they had reduced him to the lowest state of mortal suffering and ignominy. The parallel extends still farther; for Samson fainting with the contest, and relieved by a miraculous spring from the rock, typified the Redeemer on the cross, saying, "I thirst;" and when he had tasted the vinegar, he shouted the song of the victor, "It is finished." The well opened for the support of Samson, continued as a testimony of his great achievement, and was distinguished by his name for many ages: in like manner the grace wrought out for sinners by the oblation of Christ, is immutable, and a standing memorial of it has been instituted for the consolation of believers through all generations. "In that day," saith the prophet, "there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." Zech. xiii. 1. Faith in the atonement, not only procures us the pardon of past

offences, but that principle of sanctification by which alone we can make such an improvement in holiness as is indispensable to the attainment of the beatific vision.

To this inexhaustible supply of mercy we are invited to come at all times for the renewal of the divine life, by which we are enabled to "mount up with wings as eagles, to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint." Is. xl. 31. When wounded by temptation and depressed by fear, an application to the flowing stream of the Saviour's blood will heal all our maladies, and inspire us with vigilance and fortitude to defeat the wily snares and assaults of the great adversary of our souls, and to rise triumphantly over the delusive pleasures of a sinful world.

It is then no less our inestimable privilege than it is our bounden duty to receive with gladness, and to obey with alacrity, the call of our Lord in his Gospel and his ordinances; "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." John, vii. 37, 38.

APRIL THE FIFTH.

THE DEATH OF SAMSON.

Judges, xvi. 30.—*And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein; so the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.*

THE fall of Samson, and the temporary loss of his high symbolical character, will be found to afford a most instructive lesson, particularly in showing the

weakness of human nature, and the utter inability of man to contend against evil in his own strength. After judging Israel with great glory twenty years, the blandishments of vice drew him aside from the path of duty, and unmindful of that purity which was necessary to the maintenance of his exalted privilege, he gave a loose to inordinate passions by roaming from one object to another till he became at last a prey to his enemies. His first connexion was with a harlot of Gaza, where he narrowly escaped from the confederacy of the Philistines, by carrying away the gates of their city at midnight, while they lay in wait to apprehend him in the morning. This danger and deliverance, instead of making him cautious and penitent, circumspect and vigilant over his heart and conduct, produced the contrary effects by filling his mind with pride and presumption. He next placed his affections upon a strange woman in the valley of Sorek, named Dalilah, or the consumer, and with great propriety was she so called, for such indeed are all women of that description, since they not only destroy the substance, but the very principles of those who suffer themselves to be entangled in their allurements. This last attachment proved fatal to the peace and honour of Samson, who might have seen, if folly had not bewitched his understanding, that the seducer was in the interest of his adversaries, by her importunate desire to obtain the knowledge of the secret which constituted his security. It is evident that he had suspicions of her sincerity, by the deceptions which he practised to elude her designs; but as fools make a mock of sin, which in the end accomplishes their destruction, so this deluded man, by relying on his own powers, and continuing to sport with temptations, became the victim of his vain confidence. Human ingenuity is no match for sensual solicitations, and that corruption which makes its

attempts upon the passions. Hesitation in all such cases never fails to weaken the resolution; and the slightest dalliance with vicious inclinations, is certain of being followed by the depression of virtue, if not by its absolute extinction. Samson treated the artifices of his mistress with derision, and imposed upon her by two falsehoods, instead of casting her off with abhorrence, as he ought to have done, when she first endeavoured to pervert his integrity. Familiarity with error lessens the idea of its deformity, and produces that state of indifference which usually terminates in a complete submission to its devices. This was fully instanced in Samson, who tarnished all the lustre of his former days by an ignoble and licentious connexion, which reduced him to slavery, and hastened his dissolution; so just is the observation of the wise King of Israel, "by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread; and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life." Prov. vi. 26. From this portion of the history we learn the necessity of habitual sobriety, humility, and diligence, to bring us with safety through the probationary course to which we are called, as the heirs of immortality. The Church of God, while on earth, is thoroughly militant, and therefore every member of this holy community must expect to encounter in various directions the wiles of seduction, which, if not resisted in their first approaches, will prove more injurious to the tranquillity of his conscience than all the fiery assaults of the enemy. While Samson was actively exercised in the sphere of public service, he could neither be entrapped by stratagem nor subdued by violence; but when he gave way to indolence, and deviated into the paths of unlawful pleasure, he soon came under the dominion of those who for many years had been accustomed to dread his exploits, and to regard his very name with terror. Thus in the Christian life our pre-

servation lies in constant employment and vigilance, the careful discharge of the duties assigned us, and the regular investigation of our thoughts and actions. If we follow the bent of our desires without due inquiry, the unrestrained passions will carry us among snares and temptations, from which it will be the more difficult to escape, because the mind is unprepared for resistance: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." 1 Cor. x. 12. But Divine mercy did not forsake Samson in the dungeon of Gaza, where he experienced abundant consolation in the gradual renewal of his strength, accompanied no doubt by faith, watered with the tears of repentance. His symbolical character was also restored, and he arose from the low state of misery into which he had been thrown, with redoubled vigour; like man from the corruption of the fall and the tyranny of Satan, by virtue of his union with the Almighty Saviour. The cowardly Philistines, who knew not how to respect the extraordinary qualities of their captive, sent for him to make them sport in the temple of their idol; when, guided by supernatural impulse, he exerted all his force and perished with his insulting persecutors; "so the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life." Thus the end of Samson, like his beginning, figured the Redeemer, who "blotted out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made show of them openly, triumphing over them in his suffering." Col. ii. 14, 15.

APRIL THE SIXTH.

ORPAH AND RUTH.

Ruth, i. 14.—*And they lifted up their voice, and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her.*

THE preceding history exhibited the consequence of female influence in the fall of an eminent servant of God, who while he stood was an illustrious type of the Redeemer; but whose degeneracy affords a correct picture of human nature, sunk from righteousness and enslaved by sin. At present our attention is called to a very different spectacle, to objects more amiable, and to scenes truly pleasing and instructive. The story is indeed so beautiful, that, separate from its importance as a Divine composition and evangelical application, it engages the heart by the powerful effects of pathetic description, and improves it by various lessons of morality. In the days when Israel was governed by judges, and most probably during the severe distress occasioned by the oppression of Midian, a man of Bethlehem, named Elimelech, sold his paternal estate, and with his wife, Naomi, and their two sons, went to reside in the land of Moab. When the young men were relieved from all restraint by the death of their father, they entered into the marriage state with women of the country. As unequal matches seldom prosper, these contracts, made in violation of an express statute, were unattended with the Divine blessing upon the two Israelites, who died without issue among strangers and idolaters. So long as Naomi was surrounded with domestic comforts, she seems to have thought little of her native country, but now when she found herself bereaved of husband and children, the pleasures to which she had been ac-

customed, lost all their attractions, and the language of her heart corresponded with the complaint of the exiled Psalmist, "Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!" Ps. cxx. 5. The sense of her destitute condition impelled her thoughts towards the family of God, and she was anxious to return into its peaceful bosom, there to enjoy that tranquillity which never could be obtained among the vanities of Moab. Thus it is that Sovereign Goodness turns our crosses, disappointments, and distresses, into benefits; and by bringing us through the thorny path of affliction hastens our arrival at the seat of happiness. Like Naomi we should be too generally disposed to set up our rest in the enjoyments of this transitory state, and to feel no interest in the permanent concerns of religion, if the objects of our affections were not made the means of punishing our insensibility and ingratitude. Divine mercy takes away temporal blessings, that we may know how to value those which are eternal, and cuts up the roots of vain trust and earthly satisfaction, to quicken our growth in virtue. When all was a blank in Moab, the disconsolate widow looked with weeping eyes towards Judah, for she heard that the Lord had visited his people with bread. This alteration in the affairs of Israel had taken place long before, but the circumstance failed to excite any lively emotion in the mind of Naomi, till the pressure of her own misfortunes induced her to profit by the intelligence. Happy is that poverty which empties the soul of all its carnal aims, draws it off from the vain pursuits of this world, and leads it to the inheritance, where only that bread can be obtained which endureth for ever. The resolution formed upon right principles is soon carried into effect; and this poor woman having determined to spend the remainder of her eventful life in Judah, "arose and went forth out of the place

where she was, and her two daughters-in-law went with her." When we see these young women, for such they still were, leaving their parents and other connexions in Moab, to accompany a person whose relation to them was dissolved, we are at a loss which most to admire, their extraordinary affection, or the virtue by which it was attracted. Age and youth are at the best but unsociable companions; and they frequently become intolerable when care and penury depress their spirits and cloud their prospects. Here, however, that which usually disunites the most familiar associates, and renders them barely civil to each other, had the opposite effect; and when the poor mourner signified her intention of returning to Judah, her two friends resolved to share with her the fatigues of the long and perilous journey. One of them, it is true, after proceeding part of the way, yielded to the remonstrances of Naomi and went back to her kindred; but this conduct ought not to be matter of surprize, since it required uncommon fortitude to shake off the possessions of Moab for the unknown privileges of Israel. Should any be inclined to think hardly of Orpah, they would do well to reflect upon their own reluctance to renounce the enjoyments of sense and the vanities of this world, for the invisible realities of eternity. This woman had some excellent qualities, among which, that of a feeling and grateful heart was one of the most conspicuous, but she wanted firmness; and in the moment of trial, the delights of Moab proved dearer to her than the friendship of Naomi. There are many who cheerfully go a little way in the path of religion, and profess themselves to be the most zealous disciples of the Redeemer, till the hour of trial comes, when their good desires yield to the force of temptation, and they walk no more with him. Not so the true believer, who, knowing that holiness and happiness are inseparable, resolves to

follow the one under every difficulty, and against all opposition of time and sense, for the attainment of the other. This difference in principle and conduct was represented in the behaviour of these two sisters; for at the crisis, when faith pointed one way and the allurements of Moab, like those of the world, appeared in the contrary direction, Orpah no longer hesitated, but kissed Naomi and departed; while Ruth clave unto her.

The eldest of these females was ardent in her professions, and had no doubt great benevolence in her disposition; but the mere partiality of friendship and good-nature will be found of little strength in deciding rightly between such contending and unequal powers as duty and interest. The affection of Ruth was founded upon a purer and more stable basis, for she loved Naomi in the bonds of holiness. Taught the efficacy of grace by the force of example, she resolved to cast in her lot with the people of God; and as she had been brought into an alliance which made her acquainted with the promise of eternal life, she determined not to risk the loss of so great a blessing, by going back again to the corruptions of Moab. That this was the glorious spring of her resolutions and action, is evident from the declaration which she made after the departure of her sister: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

APRIL THE SEVENTH.

BOAZ AND RUTH.

Ruth, ii. 12.—*The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.*

WHAT became of Orpah after her separation from Naomi, is not recorded; for having chosen her portion in Moab she was forgotten, while the memory of her sister shall continue to be blessed through all generations, according to the word of truth: "the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." 1 John, ii. 17. Divine Providence brought the two sojourners safely to Bethlehem, where the inhabitants gathered in crowds around them, and sympathized with Naomi upon her altered condition. It is also plain that the arrival of Ruth excited much attention, for we find that her story became the subject of popular discourse, and that the motives of her conduct attracted universal admiration. But the benevolence of these people seems to have been confined to trifling acts of courtesy, the expression of pity, and the language of admiration. The affliction of their kinswoman, and the fidelity of the stranger, produced more curiosity than charity; so apt are mankind to make inquiries for their own gratification, rather than to relieve distress or to reward merit. Yet penury and neglect will sometimes be found the most essential points in the plan of Infinite Wisdom, for the purpose of advancing the heirs of light to the stations best adapted for their own glory and the public benefit.

In calling Naomi out of Moab, and inspiring Ruth with the generous sentiment of leaving all her connexions for the sake of righteousness, the Father of

mercies had a gracious design, not only for their particular advantage, but the perpetual good of the church. Every step in this interesting concern was out of the ordinary course of human occurrences, that the whole might appear to come "from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." Isa. xxviii. 29. It was now that joyful season of the year when the overflowing bounty of heaven, and the cheerfulness of nature, proclaimed to man the duty of showing his gratitude to God, by liberality to the destitute. But the law of Israel gave the poor a right to the residue of the harvest and of the vintage, by an express injunction that the scattered ears of corn, the forgotten sheaves, and the gleanings grapes, should be left "for the stranger, for the fatherless, and the widow." To the benevolent provisions of this statute Ruth had two powerful claims, yet she would not presume to assert them without first consulting the opinion of Naomi, and obtaining her consent. As a stranger, and a widow she might have gone into the fields and have gathered after the reapers, on equal grounds with all who were in similar circumstances; but the strong privilege which she possessed, only served to make her more careful of treading in the path of duty, and of observing the strictest forms of propriety. She knew what could be legally done; but the question of prudence was in her mind of greater moment than the feeling of necessity, and the power of relieving it, which opportunity now presented. Many things may be lawful, and even advisable, which are not expedient; this amiable woman, therefore, piously determined to take the counsel of a more experienced judgment than her own, before she would engage in a course which was both perfectly equitable in itself, and on all accounts consistent with her situation and character. This conduct exhibits a striking contrast to that of young persons in

general, who rush into measures of the greatest moment and complicated difficulty, according to their inclinations and preconceptions, neglecting the admonitions of the wise, and despising the caution of the aged. Hence it is that so many become distressed in their circumstances, and more miserable in their tempers, because they made a hasty and headstrong choice at the outset of their career; while on the other hand the humble and submissive spirits, like the excellent female before us, by taking good counsel at the beginning and acting with deliberation, pass the great journey of life with honour, and end it in peace. Ruth having obtained the approbation of her friend, went out with confidence, and by the providential direction she gleaned in the field of Boaz, the wealthiest man in Bethlehem, but who was rendered more illustrious by his generosity and piety, than by his rank and property. Struck with the appearance of the stranger, and affected by the story of her uncommon faith and filial affection, the good man gave vent to his feelings in this tender language: "It hath fully been showed me all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband; and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." When Ruth related in the evening the events of the day, and mentioned the name of the person who had treated her with so much goodness, the narrative awakened in the mind of Naomi the recollection of former benefits, and she said, "Blessed be he of the Lord who hath not left off his kindness to the living and the dead." This eulogy, proceeding as it did from the spontaneous emotions of grateful remembrance, showed, that benevolence in Boaz was

* permanent principle, not the sentimental feeling which is touched by appearances and vanishes with the occasion that excited its compassion. According to the declaration of Naomi, her family had found in Boaz a steady friend in former days, and his sincerity was now made manifest in the hour of adversity. The gracious disposition of this valuable man was the same in all circumstances, and therefore we see him treating his labourers with courtesy, and the forlorn stranger with tenderness, giving instructions for her conduct in a spirit of pious solicitude, and coming at last to a decision in her case with the most scrupulous regard to the rules of justice and the peculiar customs of the country. This virtue, and the happiness to which it led, came from that source described with such solemn energy by the Apostle: "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as he is, so are we in this world." 1 John, iv. 16, 17.

APRIL THE EIGHTH.

NAOMI AND RUTH.

Ruth, iv. 14, 15.—*And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age.*

THE prominent characters of this beautiful history exhibit models of virtue in different conditions of life; and each, with marks of particular excellence;

illustrating the power of religion in the heart, and its practical operation on the conduct. In Naomi we observe entire patience and resignation to the Divine will, under the heavy load of accumulated affliction in Moab; and perfect meekness when the melancholy change of her circumstances became the subject of general conversation after her return to Bethlehem. But this dark night of adversity was not left without a ray of friendship to cheer the gloom, though to appearance the feeble consolation was more calculated to increase than to dispel the trouble with which the poor widow was surrounded. Poverty too generally begets censure; and they who are little in the habit of performing good actions themselves, are always suspicious of the motives of others. By many, no doubt, the attachment of Ruth was considered as romantic and extravagant, while others more disposed to pity the young than to excuse the old, were probably severe in their remarks upon the imprudence of bringing a helpless female from the circle of her relations, to encounter want and hardship among strangers.

But the example of this amiable woman, like the morning star glittering above the horizon, announced a day of gladness to Naomi, and gave the prospect of more glorious times to Israel. The affection and self-denial, humility and submission of Ruth, were the sure evidences of that faith which worketh by love; and thus was she adorned with all the graces required in the church to recommend her to the heavenly Bridegroom. Obedient to the call of grace, she resisted every solicitation of flesh and blood, resolving to follow the course dictated by conscience, though it might lead to poverty and contempt, pain and labour. In language similar to the prophetic declaration of her royal descendant, did the voice of heaven speak to her heart; "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear: forget also thine

own people, and thy father's house. So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him." Ps. xlv. 10, 11. As Ruth represented the holy community, or mystical spouse of the Messiah, called out of darkness into marvellous light, and from the power of Satan unto God, so Naomi was an expressive type of the Church of Israel, which being merely a preparatory institution, was of necessity to decline on the approach of a better covenant. The period in which these two widows came to Bethlehem, was figurative of the fulness of time when the services of the law, and the declarations of prophecy, were to receive their completion in the mission of Him who said to his disciples, "Behold I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to the harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that both he that soweth, and he that reapeth, may rejoice together." Johu, iv. 35, 36. In the deportment of Boaz we have an outline of the qualities which shone forth with such distinguished lustre in the character of the Redeemer. To the most dignified resolution was added gracious condescension of manner; an affectionate tenderness to unbounded generosity; while instruction was communicated with meekness, and the cause of the afflicted maintained with deliberate firmness. Impressed by no other sentiment than a sacred regard to the high concerns of mercy and truth, Boaz set an example of what ought to be done by every steward of the Divine bounty; and when afterwards called upon to discharge an act of justice, he fulfilled it with a scrupulous regard to the ordinances of his country. Here also was portrayed in shadow, the conduct of our Divine Master, who went about doing good and preaching righteousness, before he accomplished the great work of reconciliation on the cross. This marriage of Boaz.

and Ruth was blessed with a son, who proved the grandfather of David; and thus the union of Jew and Gentile, by the birth of the Messiah, was plainly indicated; to which also the congratulation of the women of Bethlehem obviously referred, as the fond hope of general expectation: "And they said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life and a nourisher of thine old age; for thy daughter-in-law which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him." To whatever extent this language might be realized in the temporal circumstances of Naomi, the whole certainly applies with far greater force and propriety to the blessing descending upon mankind by the birth of Christ. His name is indeed famous, for it is exalted above every name; of him only can it be said that he is the restorer of life; and the church redeemed out of all lands by his blood, will thankfully set the seal of her faith to the verity of his promise: "The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone: these, where had they been? Thus saith the Lord God, Behold I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord; for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me." Isa. xlix, 20—23.

APRIL THE NINTH.

THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL.

- 1 Samuel, i. 27, 28.—*For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition, which I asked of him; therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord.*

IN nothing is the wisdom of Providence more conspicuous than the manner of raising up fit instruments for great purposes. When the desires of men are frustrated, and their hopes give way to despondency, the Almighty brings light out of darkness, and deliverance from a quarter the least expected. If we seriously habituated ourselves to observe the course of the world at large, or only our own particular lives, so many instances of special interposition in the direction of human affairs would be seen as to impress our minds with an awful sense of that infinite Power and Intelligence, who governs the universe by methods of which man has no knowledge, and against which he can neither apply force nor cunning. Numerous incidents, illustrative of this important truth, are scattered throughout the Sacred History; and though for the most part they are expressly noted as the effects of supernatural agency acting upon ordinary means, yet, to the persons immediately concerned, they did not appear at all more remarkable than those circumstances which, in our day, are loosely ascribed to a concurrence of fortunate events, or the blind impulse of chance. But so far were these occurrences from being fortuitous, that on tracing them to their causes we shall find them coeval with the disorders they were intended to correct; thus affording the consolatory reflection, that when any evil prevails in the moral system, the

remedy is always provided at the same time, though the sufferer sees it not. Thus in the history of the great change which was about to take place in the government of Israel, through the degeneracy of national manners, the narrative begins with the account of a private family. Now to many it may seem very extraordinary that the public records of a great kingdom should open with the minute relation of domestic transactions, apparently of little or confined interest, and rather calculated for incidental allusion than the formality of a long and particular introduction. But this is the folly of criticism, when it sets up the fastidious taste of human judgment, as the arbiter of Divine operations and of inspired compositions. The declension of the priesthood presented a melancholy foreboding of great calamity to a people whose theocracy constituted their peculiar strength and glory. When, therefore, the appointed guardians of the sanctuary, and leaders of the congregation, became equally depraved in their principles and morals, the Almighty began to prepare the means of repairing the breach which was about to take place in the removal of his unrighteous servants, and to secure the continuance of his gracious plan for the accomplishment of the promises.

It is on this account that so circumstantial a detail is given of the inquietude which disturbed the household of Elkanah, a wealthy inhabitant of Mount Ephraim, occasioned by the fruitfulness of his wife, Peninnah, and the sterility of his more amiable and beloved Hannah. The contrast of pride and humility exhibited in the conduct of these two women, yields much valuable instruction, especially when in the issue we perceive that sanctified patience, though its trials may be long and heavy, never fails to receive the richest reward of its labours in a complete triumph over the vanities of the

world. Of the children of Peninnah we read nothing ; but for the gentle Hannah, who endured the bitter taunts of her rival without reply, Divine goodness had a blessing in store, not only to inspire her tongue with praise, but to render her name famous through all generations. Unlike the restless Rachel, who said to her husband, " Give me children or else I die," and afterwards lost her own life while affording it to another, Hannah went to the tabernacle, where she breathed forth in silence the grief of her heart, before Him who alone could remove the burthen of her reproach. The firmness of her faith, and the purity of her desires, appeared in the vow which she made, that if the Lord would grant her a man-child, he should be devoted to the service of God all the days of his life. This sacred obligation she discharged with scrupulous exactness, not only by giving her son a name suited to his birth, Samuel, or Asked of God, but by training him up with the utmost care for the holy offices to which he was consecrated from the womb. Many parents, under like circumstances, would have parted from their child with extreme reluctance, and that not without putting off the time by many plausible excuses. But Hannah was a woman of no ordinary mind ; for though distinguished by the meekness of her spirit, she was strong in resolution, and therefore she made the sacrifice required by duty, not merely with a willing but a cheerful heart. On coming to Shiloh, and presenting her tender offering to the high-priest, she said, with an air of pious exultation and gratitude, " Oh, my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed ; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him : therefore also I have lent him to the Lord ; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord." Plain as this declaration may be, it would be far

more correct and emphatical if read thus: "He whom I have obtained by prayer shall be returned to the Lord," which literally corresponds with the original, besides being expressive of the name given to the child, and descriptive of that solemn vow by which he was separated unto God.

Thus was Samuel brought into the sanctuary in the exact time of need, when a spiritual deadness was spreading over the land, through the indolence and corruption of those who held the high office of ministering in holy things. Little did Hannah think for what eminence her child was born, and that in receiving this recompense of her faith and resignation, she was instrumental to the national welfare. But so extensive in reality did the blessing prove, and the narrative was purposely given, that believers might be encouraged to pray most fervently in seasons of the deepest private distress, and the greatest public calamity. They may not perhaps see the immediate effect of their petitions; yet even the spirit of prayer will strengthen their fortitude, and enable them to overcome the world, while in the triumphant language of Hannah they feel assured that "the Lord will keep the feet of his saints: and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail."

APRIL THE TENTH.

ELI AND HIS SONS.

1 Samuel, ii. 30.—*Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*

HAVING conducted Samuel into the tabernacle, for which service he was well prepared by the instruct

tions of his excellent mother, the Sacred History brings us acquainted with two young men of an opposite character to his, though possessing superior advantages. Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, the high-priest, through the criminal indulgence of their father, fell into a scandalous course of life, and abused the authority which they possessed, to the public injury and the dishonour of religion. Their servants also, as is usual in such cases, taking advantage of the libertine spirit which they beheld in those from whom they ought to have learnt better things, added intolerable insult and outrage to the oppressions of the people. Eli himself appears to have been a man of pious sentiments, but he wanted firmness to qualify him for his high office, and thus he suffered the weakness of parental feelings to prevail over the sentiments which ought to have actuated him as the minister of God. He was not ignorant of the errors and enormities of his children, for the whole land was filled with the reports of them; but instead of exerting his power to correct the abuses which prevailed in his family, he rested satisfied with administering a little gentle reproof to the offenders, who became more hardened by his lenity, and pursued the career of wickedness with greater violence. As Eli united the civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction in his own person, his conduct was most reprehensible, for he was guilty of neglecting his duty as a father and as a chief priest; while the nation, through his indolence as the supreme magistrate, suffered the greatest misery from the prevalence of iniquities which it was his province to have punished without any regard to the ties of friendship, or even of blood.

Eli no doubt gave his sons an education suited to their rank and the situation they would be called to fill in the commonwealth; but with this he seems, like too many in our day, to have considered his principal obligation as fulfilled. Having qualified

them as he thought for the routine of sacerdotal duty, and the forms of the ritual service, he was glad to be relieved from part of the public burthen; and thus, for the sake of personal enjoyment, he permitted those irregularities to increase beyond the power of remedy, which by timely vigilance he might have prevented. While he sat at his ease, and excused himself from business on account of his advanced age, these profligates perpetrated the most flagitious practices at the very door of the tabernacle, so that "men abhorred the offering of the Lord." This was in the natural course of events; for it requires a cool judgment and dispassionate temper to separate the value of any system from the abuse of its administration. When they whose province it is to teach and lead others in the way of righteousness, as much by the force of example as by the power of persuasion, are ~~scen~~ tarnished by pride and avarice, levity and extravagance, an inordinate attachment to the things of this world, and an eager pursuit of its riches and honours, the people will be little disposed to give them credit for the purity of their doctrine, or the sincerity of their belief.

Parents and persons in authority may fancy that the word of monition is sufficient, when it comes enforced by the experience of years and the dignity of office, but they will find to their mortification that precepts and exhortation are of little weight, unless invigorated by the reverence of active virtue. The foundations of morality and religion are indeed eternal, but their influence upon society will always be in proportion to the energy of zeal and correctness of deportment, manifested by those who are called to the discharge of public duties. If parents and masters consider their trust as confined within the limits of general instruction, however excellent may be the system, its operation will be weak when dry precepts are opposed to temptation, and the imma-

ture judgment has to contend against the violence of the passions. It will be then seen that much more is needful than the forms of early discipline, to fit the young for the great adventure of human life; and that he has failed in the essential part of his charge, who contents himself with putting them in the right way without going before them in it, and keeping a watchful eye over their engagements and pursuits, so long as he has any claim to their attention and respect.

Eli thought to do much, and with this he endeavoured to satisfy his conscience, by giving serious advice to his disorderly children; but though his language was good, and his arguments strong, the offenders were not to be reformed by words, nor could the evils be cured by remonstrances. "He that spareth the rod," saith the Wise Man, "hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Prov. xiii. 24); And this observation was fully verified in the present instance; for as a man is said to hate his own soul who forms sinful connexions, because they are destructive of happiness; so he who connives at the youthful vices which he ought to punish and eradicate, suffers that spiritual principle to become a prey to the enemy, which with care and attention might have been nourished to eternal life. The sin of Eli was that of omission, for no positive crimes are charged to his account; but this shows that man must be more than merely inoffensive in his manners, and sound in his principles; and that however narrow may be his sphere, or lowly his condition, he must add to the rectitude of faith every practical virtue. This is a state of progress and of trial, where much is to be learnt, that we may be enabled to enter upon any new course to which Providence shall call us without fear, and terminate it without reproach. Whether, therefore, it be in a public or private capacity, we shall find our obliga-

tions to watchfulness, and the necessity of diligence, continually increasing, to the remotest period of our lives and the utmost stretch of our faculties, that we may secure the promise contained in the declaration made to Eli, and avoid the threatening which in the history of his family was so dreadfully fulfilled; "Them that honour me I will honour; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

APRIL THE ELEVENTH.

THE CALL OF SAMUEL.

I Samuel, iii. 21.—*And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh; for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh, by the Word of the Lord.*

AN awful picture is drawn of the state of religion under the administration of Eli, after he had received the denunciation of heavy judgments on account of the sacrilegious iniquities of his children, which were the consequences of his sloth and negligence. This high-priest did not want piety, but he had more regard for his own personal comfort than zeal for the Divine honour. His character, and the dismal effects of that lethargy into which he fell, could scarcely be more forcibly expressed than in this description; "He was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see, ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord; where the ark of God was." With the holy lamp of the sanctuary went out that spiritual illumination which it represented, for "the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision." It may well be supposed, that in such degenerate times, when corruption commenced at the house of God, the people were destroyed for the

lack of knowledge ; but by the Word of the Lord, in this place, must be understood something more than public instruction ; for the assertion which follows can apply to nothing short of some visible manifestation, which in former periods had been common, but was now become so infrequent as to be peculiarly precious. That gracious Person who spake to Moses from the flaming bush, and afterwards conducted his inheritance through the wilderness, who established them in the land which he promised to their fathers, and fixed his glory among them for their defence, now withdrew his sanctifying presence from the tabernacle, and his enlightening influence from its ministrations. His language concerning Israel in another age, seems literally to have suited the present occasion, when darkness covered the land because their priests rejected knowledge ; therefore, said he, " I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face : in their affliction they will seek me early." Hos. v. 15.

That the nation should suffer for the iniquities of their leaders, may appear, in the estimation of superficial observers, contrary to justice ; but a different conclusion will be formed when their conduct under the calamity is considered. Instead of humbling themselves in penitence and prayer before the Lord for a removal of the evil, they abhorred his offering and despised his service. They turned their backs on the altar and neglected the Divine ordinances, and thus were they guilty of robbing God of his honour on account of the unfaithfulness of his servants. After a similar manner has the peace of the church been disturbed in every age, by the pride of schism and the licentiousness of infidelity, the success of which has always depended less upon reasoning than the prejudice arising from the miscarriages of those who minister in holy things. Without making any allowance for human infirmities, or considering that the

Divine institutions must be preserved by obedience, too many are disposed to break the bond of Christian unity, under the delusive plea of quitting an unprofitable ministry for superior edification, when their very separation shows that the impediments to improvement lay in the arrogance and uncharitableness of their own minds. Dissatisfied and degenerate as the Israelites were, they did not presume to set up an altar in opposition to that of Shiloh, neither did they conceive that it was lawful to serve the Lord in a violation of his own appointment. They made no attempts to subvert the ecclesiastical state, or to alter the succession, because Eli slumbered on his post, and his sons wallowed in debauchery. So far then the conduct of Israel may be considered as entitled to praise, and it was rewarded by the call of a prophet, endued with superior powers to any who preceded him in that high office since the settlement of the people in the promised land. In this history the conduct of Samuel presents many points of valuable instruction. His habitual diligence was manifest in the readiness with which he obeyed what he believed to be the summons of the high-priest; and his patient fidelity appeared conspicuously when on the repetition of the voice, instead of lying and complaining at the peevish unreasonableness of old age, he again rose and said, "Here am I, for thou didst call me." Samuel, though a child, was an active and faithful servant; he neither took advantage of his master's infirmities to indulge himself in ease, nor became contaminated by the vicious examples with which he was surrounded. He was careful to do his duty when his elders neglected theirs, and he preserved the native purity of his mind, amidst the continual allurements of powerful temptations. It might seem as if nothing was wanting to the perfection of such a character, yet the delineation receives a finished heightening of exquisite sweetness in the

modesty and affection of the youth after the Divine communication. He lay down till the accustomed hour in the morning, and then went about his ordinary employment, without feeling any of that importance which usually distinguishes those who have been suddenly raised to honour, and put in possession of a mighty trust. It is said that "he was afraid to tell Eli the vision;" but it was not the dread of displeasure or the apprehension of resentment that withheld him from revealing the momentous secret:—his fear resulted from the most affectionate concern for the peace of his venerable patron, and an anxious desire to avoid wounding the heart of one whom he regarded with sentiments of filial esteem and pious reverence. When, however, he was obliged to reveal his commission, he did it explicitly, without attempting to conceal any part of the tremendous malediction that had been made known to him in so remarkable a manner, or to soften the terms in which it was conveyed. The high-priest, struck with the force of Divine Truth speaking by the mouth of an infant, submitted to the sentence in a spirit of humility, and expressed himself in language of religious resignation, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." From this time Samuel was established as a prophet, and the Word of the Lord again became known by his ministry in Shiloh, thus presenting an encouraging example of the efficacy of early religion, and speaking to parents as in the endearing and energetic invitation of the Redeemer in the days of his flesh: "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God." Luke, xviii. 16.

APRIL THE TWELFTH.

THE DEATH OF ELI.

1 Samuel, iv. 18.—*And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward, by the side of the gate; and his neck brake, and he died.*

NEVER perhaps was the difference between the form and power of religion more strongly displayed than in the circumstances which attended the loss of the Ark of Israel, and the fate of those who had that sacred object entrusted to their care. The people having been repulsed in an attack upon the Philistines, began to enquire into the cause, and to express their astonishment at the disaster which had befallen them. Either from the infrequency of war, or a long habit of success, they seem to have contracted the notion that to march against the enemy was to ensure victory to themselves. But their confidence was now humbled, and they had the mortification of being obliged to turn their backs in the day of battle, leaving four thousand of their countrymen dead on the field. The elders, in their consultation upon this afflicting event, speculated so far in a right spirit as to trace it to the want of the Divine presence among them; but they were strangely deficient in failing to examine the reasons why that gracious interposition of favour had been in this instance withdrawn from them. Instead of looking for the source of the evil in the national depravity, and the sacrilegious conduct of those who ought to have set a public example of virtue and piety, which might have produced a general reformation, this assembly formed the hasty resolution of preventing a recurrence of the misfortune by an uncommon device. In better times the Israelites would have gone to con-

sult the Divine Oracle in the holy place, and by prostrating themselves before the Lord in penitence and prayer, they would have endeavoured to avert his anger and to have propitiated his mercy. But this generation of men, wise in their own conceits, adopted quite another course, and as if they thought humiliation did not become them, or that they stood in need of no better counsel than their own, they conceived the daring project of bringing the Ark of God from Shiloh to the camp. The novel scheme was no sooner devised than carried into effect; and so deplorable was the state of morals and the government at this time, that even the high-priest had no power to oppose the presumptuous folly of the people, though his foreboding heart predicted the consequences. Eli could not but be fully sensible that this was an unlawful act, yet he wanted spirit even to remonstrate with the elders, and to show them faithfully the sin, and danger of their proceeding. He did indeed tremble for the Ark of God, and well he might when he saw it taken from the sanctuary without any Divine warrant, and wantonly exposed to hazard by the profane hands of his own sons, who were evidently at the head of this confederacy. These men seem to have thought that there was an inherent virtue in the material glory of the tabernacle, which would invigorate its possessors and render them invincible, without any regard to their character or conduct. Wicked men are very frequently slaves to the most debasing superstition, so that the weakest fancies in their minds will either buoy them up with fallacious hopes or depress them with unreasonable fears. Though ignorant of the power of a living faith, they sometimes act with temerity, which appears like religious confidence; and hence they often succeed in deceiving both themselves and others, by an ardent zeal for notions and observances which have the semblance of truth and

the air of piety. When the Ark came into the camp the Israelites set up so great a shout that the earth rang again; for much as the spirit of religion had been neglected by this people, they had not lost all belief of its efficacy. But their principles were neither rightly formed nor properly directed, and hence it was that they rested satisfied in the fatal persuasion that the privilege of being God's inheritance was sufficient to entitle them to a continuance of his favour. They did not consider the obligations which this distinction laid upon them to serve the Lord in his ordinances, and to live in all holy obedience to his commandments. An external profession, in their opinion, was equivalent to righteousness, and a proud attachment to the ark of the covenant constituted their great claim to the Divine blessing. This was a miserable delusion, but it is to be feared that too many, even under a clearer dispensation, and with this history before their eyes, fall into one not less wretched and pernicious. To be members of some particular communion, and to display much ardour of affection for its interests, is often made a palliative for the gross negligence of universal duties; while some there are, who think that a general regard for the doctrines of the Gospel will prove an ample substitute for the want of its graces and virtues. The intelligence that the Ark of God was the cause of the rejoicing which they heard, occasioned a great panic among the Philistines, because it was an unheard-of thing, and they had the most fearful ideas of the power of Jehovah, who had wrought so many mighty wonders in Egypt and the wilderness. But as opposite effects are sometimes produced by the same means, so it was in this instance; for the persons who were expected to have been inspired by the presence of the Ark became over-confident and disorderly, while their opponents, upon whom that object was intended to act with terror, fought

so desperately as to gain the victory. The fate of the battle was quickly carried to Shiloh, where Eli sat watching the result with trembling anxiety; but though he could listen to the description of slaughter and defeat without betraying much emotion, and even hear unmoved that his sons were among the slain, yet when the messenger closed his tale with the dreadful tidings that the Ark of God was taken, it overpowered his faculties, and he perished on the spot. At the same time the wife of Phinehas was delivered of a son, and then died, after having given the name of Ichabod to the child, as expressive of her feelings: "And she said, 'The glory is departed from Israel, for the Ark of God is taken.'" Thus in the history of this family we see the extensive and complicated evils which may arise from parental indulgence, and the want of that early discipline so necessary to the formation of the human mind, and the regulation of its conduct. The ease and goodness of Eli might to some appear as very pardonable failings, if not commendable qualities; but they brought misery upon himself, an untimely end to his children, confusion in the church, and ruin to the commonwealth; so true is the observation of the Wise Man, "By much slothfulness the building decayeth, and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through."—Eccles. x. 18.

APRIL THE THIRTEENTH.

RESTORATION OF THE ARK.

1 Samuel, vi. 20.—*And the men of Beth-shemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God? and to whom shall he go up from us?*

THOUGH the Philistines were so much afraid when they heard that the Ark of God was brought into the

camp of Israel, yet when it fell into their hands they seem to have thought that the power which presided over it was withdrawn, or subjugated by the influence of a superior deity. With some such sentiments they took the trophy, and deposited it in the temple of their national idol, rejoicing no doubt at having gained so great an advantage over the Hebrews and their tremendous Divinity. It was, therefore, necessary to the maintenance of the honour of Jehovah that these idolaters should be made sensible of their mistake and punished for their impiety. On this account the gigantic statue of Dagon was found by the priests lying prostrate before the Ark, to which situation it could not have fallen by accident without being broken, and crushing many other things through the violence of the concussion. Here then was a miracle plain and obvious to any common understanding, proving that this enormous mass could have been laid by nothing short of supernatural agency, before an object which in any other case must have been crushed by it to atoms. But this prodigy did not cure these people of their folly, by showing them the vanity of idolatry; on the contrary, they replaced Dagon upon the altar, and found the next morning that a more signal disgrace had befallen the idol by the mutilation of its limbs in such a way as could leave no room to doubt the cause of the ignominy. Both the priests and people were indeed convinced, but not converted, by these portents, which, instead of changing their hearts and reforming their practices, served only to confirm their attachment to the national corruption, and to increase the number of superstitious usages.

They felt and acknowledged the power of the God of Israel, but still retained his Ark in the house of Dagon, without showing any marks of reverence to the sacred vessel, or thinking of restoring it to the

sanctuary from whence it had been taken. After suffering the most terrible visitations, and sending the Ark from place to place, in the foolish hope that it would be propitious to some particular city, the Philistine chiefs held a consultation with the prophets and diviners concerning the proper course to be adopted in this exigency. The advice of these men was remarkable: "And they said, If ye send away the Ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty; but in any wise render him a trespass-offering: then ye shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you." But what follows the specification of the offering proposed by them is still more extraordinary. "Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When he had wrought wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go, and they departed?" From this it is evident that a studied, and an obstinate resistance to the miracles was in the opinion of these men the cause of all the calamities which had afflicted the country; and therefore the soothsayers did not hesitate to charge the princes and the nation with having been guilty of greater impiety than even Pharaoh and the Egyptians, whose obduracy was become proverbial.

Such we see was the force of truth, that it drew from Pagan priests an acknowledgement of the majesty of Jehovah, though it did not bring them to renounce their own abominations. This is indeed common enough; for the most abandoned as well as superstitious persons, will frequently give their assent in words to a confession of righteousness, and admit to the fullest extent the declaration of the Gospel, even where it passes a sentence of condemnation against themselves; but with this all their religion is at an end, and they sink again into their old errors without concern or amendment. According to the

directions of the wise men the Ark was sent away with the presents, and its course was miraculous; for the cattle, without any visible leader, took the road to Judah, and stood still in the field of Joshua, a native of Beth-shemesh, which was one of the cities allotted to the sacerdotal order. Great was the joy of the inhabitants on receiving the welcome visitant in so unexpected a manner; but this pleasure was soon turned into mourning and terror through their own presumptuous folly. If the Philistines justly incurred the Divine judgment for placing the Ark in a heathen temple, how much more did these Levites deserve chastisement for daring to look into it, contrary to an express prohibition, and out of mere wanton curiosity? Seventy persons perished miserably on this occasion, which filled the rest of the inhabitants with such dread, that they who exulted at having the inestimable treasure among them, were now equally anxious for its removal. They did not duly reflect that the calamity which had happened lay wholly in the irreverent spirit of those who suffered for their temerity, and that the possession of the Ark was either a blessing or a curse, according to the temper and conduct of those who had the charge of it. The same Power, whose tender mercy is over all his works, and like a beneficent parent cherishes the meek and obedient when they seek shelter under the shadow of his wings, is a consuming fire to the proud and arrogant infidel who sets up his own carnal reason in defiance of the revealed will of his Maker.

Let the consideration of this history then teach us to sanctify the Divine communications which we receive, as Abinadab consecrated his son to keep the Ark of God when it was brought from Beth-shemesh to his house. By an habitual reverence of the holy deposit we shall then derive continual comfort from that which is a terror to the fearful and the unbeliev-

REPENTANCE OF ISRAEL.

ing. Contenting ourselves with the truths there imparted, it should be our endeavour to mould them into the frame of our minds, and to render our tempers perfectly conformable to the Sacred Word, leaving all inexplicable mysteries to the sovereign disposal and teaching of Infinite Wisdom. Nothing indeed will conduce more effectually to the security of our present peace and future happiness, than the cultivation of that submissive spirit which is so feelingly and beautifully described in the personal experience of the Psalmist; "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me." Ps. cxxxix. 1.

APRIL THE FOURTEENTH.

REPENTANCE OF ISRAEL.

1 Samuel, vii. 8.—*And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.*

NATIONAL losses and individual sufferings, instead of producing reflection and reformation, frequently have a contrary effect, and only serve to increase the mass of enormity till the whole becomes ripe for judgment. When the tabernacle was deprived of its glory, attended with the most awful circumstances, it might have been reasonably expected that the people would have humbled themselves before the Lord, and supplicated the restoration of his presence. But neither at this time nor on the recovery of the Ark by the house of Judah, were any marks of public penitence manifested to show the deep sense which the Israelites had of their past errors, and

their resolution of amendment. So far indeed were they from feeling any such concern, or being actuated by the sentiments of returning piety, that they fell into the superstitious practices of their neighbours, and endeavoured to provide a substitute for the Divine Oracle which had been taken from them, in the worship of the heathen deities. Twenty years did this infatuated nation groan under a foreign yoke, which became rivetted upon them through their own insensibility and want of gratitude. In all that period they discovered no inclination towards the departed majesty of their establishment, nor by any solemn act did they express sorrow for those sins which had drawn down so great a calamity upon them. But when their grievances became intolerable, and new evils were gathering around them, the prospect of accumulating misery wrought some change in their hearts, and they began to lament after the Lord. Affliction brought them to a remembrance of their gracious Benefactor, whom they had so basely treated by renouncing his service for the infamous customs of their oppressors. When they found that these sinful compliances did not ameliorate their condition, but, on the contrary, only rendered them more contemptible in the eyes of those whom they endeavoured to please, the Israelites, in a general assembly, consulted the prophet on the means of regaining the Divine favour.

Before the death of Eli, the commission of Samuel had been recognized from one extremity of the kingdom to the other, and all Israel knew that he was established to be a prophet unto the Lord; but from the removal of the Ark to the present distress, the people seem to have paid this extraordinary person hardly any attention. They might indeed think that his communications with the Holy Spirit were suspended by the ruin of Shiloh; for so little was the power of religion felt or understood at this

time, that the great body of the nation appear to have resolved the whole into mere external observances and local distinctions. But even of these they had such vague notions as to suppose there was an inherent virtue in the things themselves, rather than in the use to which they were applied, or the grace by which they were sanctified. It is no wonder then, that men with such perverted faculties should fall into the grossest corruptions; for they who take religious ordinances and ceremonials to be religion itself, will without much difficulty exchange one fruitless profession for another. 'This was the case with the chosen seed, who having fallen into a state of dead formality and indifference, first abhorred the sacrifice of the altar, and next forsook the tabernacle altogether. Their revival from this state was gradual; they began to enquire after the Lord by the mouth of his prophet, whose advice they readily followed in renouncing the worship of Asharoath and Baalim, after which, in a general meeting at Mizpeh, the people made an open confession of their transgression, attended with fasting and other acts of religious mortification. The sincerity of this national conversion was evident from the great hazard to which it exposed the Israelites, who were at this time in a state of servitude: and accordingly we find, that when their oppressors heard of this assembly, jealousy and alarm filled their minds, being fully aware that the force of super-stition only could secure the power which they had obtained. The Philistines, like most barbarous victors, were exasperated at the liberty taken by their vassals of making an open declaration against the religious usages which had been imposed upon them by the law of conquest. To punish therefore this desertion, and to prevent, if possible, a reconciliation between God and his repentant servants, the tyrants mustered their forces in great numbers, and marched to attack the Israelites

in their unarmed and defenceless condition. To all human appearance, certainly, the state of the congregation at Mizpeh was hopeless and dismal; for they were not only without any order, but greatly reduced by the ceremonies which they had undergone; and of this their adversaries took a base advantage. But the power of prayer is greater than that of an army, however numerous or strongly appointed; and no aspirations are so ardent and acceptable as those which proceed from contrition. In their distress the people intreated the prophet to cry unto the Lord for them; and this faith, aided by his intercession, brought down a miraculous defeat of the invaders; which was succeeded by the restoration of the national independence under the government of Samuel, who erected a monument of gratitude on the spot, calling it "Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

APRIL THE FIFTEENTH.

CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT.

1 Samuel, viii. 4, 5.—*Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.*

Good men do not always experience that blessing in their children which might have been expected from the labour of cultivation and the influence of example. Now though it sometimes happens that the good-natured weakness of parents, arising from partial credulity and carried to excessive indulgence, is the sole cause of that misconduct which they deplore; yet in many cases the sobriety of religion is

charged to the account of paternal rigour and caprice, which therefore the juvenile mind cheerfully abandons when the passions grow strong, and embraces folly as a state of liberty and pleasure from which it has been too long debarred. The impetuosity of youth is apt to despise the prudence of age and the scruples of piety, thinking that in the vast extent of society and the alterations of manners, many things may be practised which in other times could not be tolerated. But one of the greatest dangers to which the early adventurer in the career of life can be exposed, is, that of being entrusted with the privilege of power before he has been disciplined by obedience, and abundantly furnished with the means of gratifying his desires before he has learnt how to regulate them. This, however, is an error which even wise and virtuous persons not unfrequently commit through a fond bias for the understanding of their offspring, and too favourable an opinion of their judgment and disposition. The Scriptures present us with several instances of this delusion and its fatal consequences, but none so remarkable as that of Samuel, who, when he found the cares of government heavy upon him, unadvisedly took his two sons to be his coadjutors, and with equal imprudence placed them for the administration of affairs in a distant part of the nation, where he could neither watch their conduct nor give them counsel. Though in this appointment the prophet was guided by the purest motives, correspondent to his own upright sentiments of public justice, yet he acted indiscreetly at least in not previously consulting the Divine Oracle on the propriety of the measure. But he put too great a confidence in his sons, the consequence of which was, that when they were removed from the restraint of his observation, they suffered themselves to be led away by the temptations which surrounded them in an office that afforded many opportunities of gratify-

ing their inordinate thirst of gain. These young men were no doubt thoroughly grounded in the knowledge of the law, for their experience under so wise and good a parent and magistrate as Samuel, must have been very considerable; but this only served to aggravate their offence, since great talents, combined with power, will always be dangerous in every community when the union is not sanctified by religious integrity. It is, however, obvious that the people were deplorably corrupt at this time, otherwise they would not have presumed to offer bribes to their judges, contrary to the strict prohibition of the statutes; and it is equally clear that the spirit of litigation was carried to an enormous extent, when it could occasion so general a complaint against the evil practices of those who were bound by every principle to minister justice with impartiality. Even the very heathens themselves could see that the multiplicity of laws indicated a degenerate condition of society, because the means of dispute and evasion hereby become increased; and an inspired Apostle ascribes the declension of Christian piety to the prevalence of legal contentions, which he justly calls a state of warfare caused by pride and envy. Such was the character of Israel at the period when Samuel devolved so large a portion of the government upon his two sons, which trust they abused by taking bribes and perverting judgment. As a remedy for this evil, the elders came to the residence of their venerable ruler, at Ramah; but instead of asking for direction, they made a peremptory demand that he would change their government: "Behold," said they, "thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways; make us a king to judge us like all the nations." The revolutionary desire in this case, as in most others, was coloured with the plausible complaint of grievances; but when these elders ought to have been seeking and applying the lawful means of

redress, under the direction of their heavenly Sovereign, they were filled with the restless desire of altering the constitution, as the only effectual cure of political maladies. But the worst of all was, that being grown weary of the theocracy which constituted their glory and defence, they wanted to approximate their polity to that of the nations around them, when it was their great privilege to be distinguished in this respect, as well as in religion, from the rest of the world. It was not the mere desire of a regal government which constituted their offence, but the violent inclination for a change in the external regimen of their state; and this the Almighty explained in answer to the prayer of his faithful servant: "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them."

By the Divine command Samuel exhibited to the people an ample detail of the effects which would be the result of their obstinacy; but no arguments or representations can divert the impetuous current of a perverse will, when set loose from the restraint of the fear of God. The assembly, in reply to the declaration of the prophet, or rather the word of the Lord by his mouth, said, "Nay, but we will have a king over us, that we may be like all other nations, to judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles." In this obduracy we have a sketch of that blindness which characterized the Jewish nation when they renounced the Messiah, who was their prophet, priest, and king; preferring the Roman yoke to that spiritual freedom and exaltation to which the expectations of their fathers had been uniformly directed. When, therefore, we read the determination of the Israelites after hearing the declaration of what would follow the grant of their request, our thoughts are transferred to that tumultuous meeting, which, in answer to the question of Pilate, "Shall I

crucify your King?" answered, "We have no King but Cæsar." John, xix. 15.

APRIL THE SIXTEENTH.

CONFIRMATION OF SAUL.

1 Samuel, xi. 14, 15.—*Then said Samuel to the people, Come and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there. And all the people went to Gilgal; and there they made Saul king before the Lord, in Gilgal; and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace-offerings before the Lord; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.*

NOTWITHSTANDING the vehement importunity of the Israelites for a revolution in their polity, and the urgent demands which they made upon Samuel to establish a monarchy among them, resembling that of other nations; yet when Saul was chosen by lot, there wanted not persons to refuse him obedience, saying, "How shall this man save us?" Such is the spirit of discontent in great communities, concerning matters of government, that when they have obtained the object of their wishes it is frequently followed by dissatisfaction and complaint, as not being commensurate with their expectations. Thus it was in the election of Saul; for though a band of men went with him, whose hearts God had touched, yet the sons of Belial, as they are called, who were by far more numerous, despised his authority and brought him no presents. This popular outcry was consonant to the disposition by which the people were led at first to desire a change in their state; for as it proceeded from inconstancy and ingratitude, it very naturally turned to proud and rebellious opposition

afterwards. The licentious multitude are ever restless and wavering in their pursuits and attachments, so that nothing remains long in favour with them, unless supported by artifice and deception. True loyalty can proceed only from the fear of God ; and they whose hearts are rightly touched by the influence of this gracious principle, will be always found the most faithful servants and obedient subjects ; while they who make the greatest professions, and cry Hosannah the loudest, will as quickly vociferate, Crucify him ! crucify him ! The new king of Israel acted on this occasion with great forbearance, generosity, and humility. He not only held his peace amidst the provoking insults of the sons of Belial, but prudently retired from the scene of public life to his rural occupations and original privacy, waiting the proper call of the Almighty to bring him into the exercise of the high office to which he had been consecrated. An opportunity soon occurred for the display of his valour and abilities, and for the consequent union of the tribes in a willing submission to his government. Nahash, the chief of the Ammonites, laid siege to Jabesh-Gilead, which city lay in the remotest part of the kingdom of Israel ; and when the inhabitants offered to become his tributaries, he refused to receive their proposal, except upon the degrading condition that all the males should lose their right eyes. Seven days were allowed these distressed people to deliberate upon the shocking terms ; the intelligence of which being brought to Gibeah, where Saul resided, excited a general outcry of grief and lamentation. The monarch himself was not present when the messengers arrived ; but on hearing the complaints of his followers, and being informed of the cause, the Divine spirit came mightily upon him, so that without any delay he slew a yoke of oxen, according to the custom of those times, and sent pieces of the victims through all the country, denouncing the heaviest

judgment upon those who failed to assemble around his standard for the relief of their brethren. This menace had the desired effect; for both Israel and Judah gathered their forces with so much promptitude, that Saul was enabled to fall upon the Ammonites by surprise, and to defeat them with a prodigious slaughter. This signal achievement so completely established the power of the king, by turning towards him the affections of the people, that they were now anxious to atone for their past indifference and neglect, by inflicting vengeance upon the men who had murmured at his election. But the moderation of Saul afforded an admirable contrast to the furious zeal of his admirers; and he said, "There shall not a man be put to death this day; for this day the Lord hath wrought salvation for Israel." This liberality of the sovereign was properly approved and seconded by the pious address of the prophet, "Come, and let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there." Victory is always rendered most glorious by mercy, and best improved by religious gratitude. The people readily followed the warrior under whose banners they had been so successful, and the seer by whose lessons they were instructed, to the altar of God, and there they rejoiced greatly while they participated in the offerings of peace and thanksgiving. Thus should all our blessings, public and private, be sanctified by the voice of grateful praise to the Author of them, accompanied with the spirit of forgiveness to enemies, and of charity towards all men. Then shall we know and feel the full force of that animating language which breathes the whole spirit of Christian love, "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord: we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord. God is the Lord which hath showed us light; bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." Ps. cxviii. 26, 27.

APRIL THE SEVENTEENTH.

THE CHARGE OF SAMUEL.

1 Samuel, xii. 23—25. *Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord, in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart; for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.*

THE authority of Saul having been fully established by a solemn act of recognition in the general assembly at Gilgal, the prophet who had for so many years presided over the nation, resigned to the sovereign the civil jurisdiction, at the same time calling upon the meeting to confirm or censure the acts of his own government. Nothing can well be imagined more affecting and instructive than the whole of this interesting scene, or more dignified than the language in which the venerable judge addressed the people: "Behold," said he, "the king walketh before you," as your leader, "and I am become old and grey-headed; and behold, my sons are with you; and I have walked before you from my childhood, unto this day." This righteous man was neither tenacious of office for himself, nor ambitious of honours and rewards for his family. Yet with a laudable desire to secure the national approbation of his conduct, and properly anxious to satisfy his conscience on retiring from his public labours, he proceeded to challenge an inquiry into the whole of his administration before the altar, and in the presence of the chief magistrate. "Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed:

whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith, and I will restore it to you." This appeal was such as became a wise and good man on laying down his office; for, without exhibiting any parade of past services, it contained the most impressive address that could be made to the people, as it was upon subjects with which they were best acquainted, and in which they were all interested. Every one present had it in his power to judge whether the administrator of the laws had been guilty of fraud, bribery, or oppression; and that the matter might be brought to a decision, Samuel offered to make ample restitution for any wrong which he had committed. On occasions like this, there are never wanting in all communities persons eager enough to scrutinize the conduct of public men, and to exaggerate even their little failings. But though the Israelites were as much disposed to complain of their rulers as any people could be, yet the whole assembly bore a honourable attestation to the integrity of Samuel, whom they fully acquitted of malversation in the long and painful discharge of his various duties among them. It will be well for every person, in whatever station or condition he may be placed, if towards the close of his labours he enters upon the same strict scrutiny of his past life as Samuel did, and like him receives an answer of peace in his conscience. But to obtain so great a blessing, the inquiry must be conducted in the same spirit which distinguished the righteous man of old. It must be an impartial and minute investigation of the whole deportment, accompanied by a sincere resolution to make every possible amends for any wrongs, intentional or otherwise, that may have been committed. The general plea of having endeavoured to do what is right, and the palliating excuse for errors, that

they were inadvertent or trivial, will only prove aggravations of guilt, and increase the measure of punishment. To constitute true repentance, there must be deep contrition and free confession of sin, a full acknowledgement of all faults open and secret, and an earnest desire of reconciliation, upon the basis of restitution, with those whom we may have aggrieved in times past. Happy are they who are brought to this state of voluntary humiliation and penitence; but still more happy will it be for those who, like Samuel, can obtain the approving testimony which arises from the calm remembrance of a life well spent, and whose "hoary hairs are a crown of glory, because they are found in the way of righteousness." Prov. xvi. 31. The venerable elder having brought the congregation to witness his fidelity, proceeded in his sacred character to lay before them their peculiar obligations to the Almighty, for the purpose of awakening them to a sense of their ingratitude in demanding an alteration of the government from the institution which had been divinely appointed.

A miraculous sign from heaven confirmed the word of the prophet, and produced the effect of convincing the people of their error, and inducing them to supplicate the Divine mercy through the mediation of his servant. Nothing could be more mild, powerful, and persuasive than the exhortation of the man of God, who mingled hope with reproof, and advice with denunciation. While he roused their fears by the display of the Divine judgments, and showing the enormity of their transgression, he consoled them with the assurance that they were still the chosen inheritance; and he taught them how to preserve that invaluable distinction, by "following the Lord, and serving him with all their heart."

The conclusion of this affecting address is very important and instructive: "As for me, God forbid

that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you ! but I will teach you the good and the right way." Samuel felt that it was a paramount duty to pray for the community to which he belonged, even in his private capacity ; and his declaration amounted to an acknowledgement that he should commit a great sin if he neglected to do this continually. The same principle ought to be our guidance in all circumstances and situations to which Providence may call us ; for though the issue of our supplications should not appear in this life, it may to our comfort and surprise in the next, when innumerable proofs will demonstrate this truth, that " the fervent prayer of the righteous man whether rich or poor, learned or unlearned, availeth much." James, v. 16.

To the promise of his constant intercessions on their behalf, the prophet added the concise but solemn admonition, equally calculated for the direction of all ranks and orders of men, from the highest to the lowest, " Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart : for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king."

APRIL THE EIGHTEENTH.

SAUL'S SACRIFICE.

- 1 Samuel, xiii. 13.—*And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly : thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee ; for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever.*

RELIGIOUS obedience is a careful regard to observe all the commandments and ordinances of God, ac-

According to his own time and the terms of his appointment. It receives the Divine injunctions without murmuring, and proceeds to execute them with a willing mind, waiting for the fulfillment of the promises in patience, and following exactly the order of Providence, though it sees neither the reason nor the destination. In all things it forms a striking contrast to that eager disposition which takes upon itself to explain the rules and to limit the precepts of Sacred Writ, according to particular prejudices and personal convenience. Of the danger attending such a presumptuous spirit in the ordinary business of life, as well as in the concerns of religion, we have a remarkable instance in the early history of Saul, who being engaged in a war with the Philistines, was directed to wait seven days at Gilgal, that he might obtain from the Prophet counsel and a blessing for the enterprize. Six days, and part of the seventh, had elapsed without any appearance of Samuel; which disappointment, added to the despondency of the people, who deserted in great numbers, threw the monarch into a state of perplexity; but instead of considering it as the trial of his faith, or a sign of disapprobation, he ventured upon an act of extreme irregularity, in violation of his engagement and the institutions which it was his province to maintain and enforce, both by authority and example. Saul thinking himself neglected by the minister of God, or apprehensive that he should be wholly abandoned by his troops, at the close of day directed of his own accord a burnt sacrifice to be offered, with the view, as he professed, of propitiating the Divine favour and inspiring his followers. But the Lord will not be served by the infraction of his own statutes, nor will he sanction the temerity of inconsiderate zeal. He can command success in his own way, and needeth not the inter-

position of man to hasten his purposes. They who think to please him by an officious display of faithfulness, and an earnest warmth to promote his glory, by methods very different from what he has laid down in his word and prescribed by his law, will meet with a judgment little less awful than that denounced upon the imprudent king of Israel. Saul, on seeing the prophet, was very ready to go and salute him, anticipating probably his approbation of what had been done, as affording an evidence of the most lively concern for the honour of religion. Finding, however, that he had acted wrong, Saul endeavoured to excuse himself on account of the delay of Samuel, and the despondency of the people, which he urged as sufficient reasons for being forced to offer a sacrifice without the sanction or presence of the prophet. This plea of compulsion is a very common one; but the truth is, that no necessity can warrant any proceeding repugnant to the word of God. If a deviation from the immutable law of righteousness be allowed in one case, it may in all, and thus the very design of revelation is rendered abortive; so that all which it has imparted for our knowledge and guidance, becomes subject to caprice and liable to perversion. But if this be a matter of serious import to all persons of every age and condition, much more certainly does it call for the deep consideration of those in authority and under circumstances which give to their opinions and practices an extensive influence. Saul was now at the head of the government; his conduct, therefore, was not merely a rash intrusion into the sacerdotal office, but calculated to lessen the reverence of the people for the established rules of the sanctuary; and though we should admit that the sacrifice was offered according to the forms of the ritual, and by the hands of the lawful priesthood, it was disorderly, because premature and contrary to the directions

which had been given him, to wait for the coming of the prophet.

His impatience and presumption tended to weaken the Divine authority in the minds of a people always inclined to discontent, and apt to fall into idolatry on the slightest temptation. But in reality this was a trial of the integrity of Saul, in the event of which he was found wanting; and on that account the word of the Lord, by the prophet, declared that his kingdom should not continue. The history teaches us the duty of adhering inflexibly to the revealed will of God, in all things that affect our obligations towards him, and the discharge of those relations which we are called to fill in society. It shows also the extreme folly and hazard of trusting to our own wisdom, and of giving way to our passions, in affairs where we have an unerring rule and the promise of superior assistance. Let us adopt the counsel of the Psalmist, and conform ourselves agreeably to it in all cases, whether clear or doubtful; so shall we reap the advantage announced to those who follow it: "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day." Ps. xxxvii. 5, 6.

APRIL THE NINETEENTH.

DESTRUCTION OF AMALEK.

1 Samuel, xv. 33.—*And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women.*

"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are the ways of the Most High higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts" (Is. lv. 9); it is

therefore our bounden duty and privilege to follow the one, and submit implicitly to the other, in all things and at all times, knowing assuredly that his commandments and proceedings are holy, just, and good. If he lays upon us any heavy injunctions, our ability to fulfill them will be experienced in the course of obedience; and when we set about the performance in a cheerful disposition, all obstacles will fall before us, till that which appeared impossible to be executed or endured will be found both easy and pleasant. The case is precisely the same with respect to the sacred oracles, which upon a casual view may seem perplexed with obscurities and irreconcilable difficulties; but to the serious mind, wholly divested of prejudice and brought into a childlike disposition of heart, light will arise over all the dark passages, enabling him to adopt the language of the royal Psalmist: "I have more understanding than all my teachers; for thy testimonies are my meditation." Ps. cxix. 99.

While the proud and curious are confounded in the multiplicity and ingenuity of their speculations, the wayfaring men, as the prophet calls the plain and simple followers of righteousness, walk stedfastly by the word of truth, continually receiving strength from its counsels, and profiting by its relations of God's dealings in ancient times. Now if we could set ourselves thoroughly to consider his agency in the moral world, and observe even the ordinary course of events upon the great theatre of human life, we should find as many circumstances to embarrass our thoughts and to distract our confidence in the existence of an all-wise, powerful, and gracious Creator of the Universe, as any doubting mind can discover in the Scriptures, which detail the dispensations of his will to particular classes of mankind. But in reality the sceptic has deeper mysteries to clear up, and more doubts to remove, than the believer, without having the same satisfactory principles to go upon;

since he finds it utterly impossible to account rationally for the innumerable disorders which prevail in the visible system, apparently impeding the general purposes of benevolence, and injurious to the idea of universal harmony, originating in the persuasion that the whole is the production of Infinite Intelligence. Here then is an essential difference between him who rests upon revelation, and the self-confident mind that is too lofty to admit its testimony. Where the one, with all his parade of subtilty and demonstration, is obliged to stop, and confess his inability to solve the slightest problem in the scheme of the Divine government, the Christian finds every point perspicuous; and the reason assigned by him for the foundation of his hope, reconciles all things, both in the word and works of God, upon the same immutable and beautiful basis of wisdom, justice, and goodness. The command then to destroy Amalek as a nation, is no more repugnant to the principles of equity than the shock of an earthquake, the sweeping ravages of a pestilence, or the pining horrors of famine, by which flourishing regions are desolated, and whole generations hurried prematurely into eternity. In these awful visitations, which depend entirely upon the Divine power, immense numbers of harmless beings are cut off amidst the severest sufferings; but in the case under consideration, we learn that the Amalekites were treacherous enemies to Israel, and avowedly rebellious against God. In directing Saul to retaliate upon them the wrongs which they had committed, and to fulfill his decree upon their government, the Almighty did no more than exercise his judicial character, by interposing his authority for the punishment of the wicked, as he continues to do, and ever will, under different terms and by various means, till the consummation of all things. This was the second trial laid upon Saul, and he failed in both; but his disobedience on the last

occasion was more flagrant than the former, because it was in direct violation of the commission entrusted to him as the minister of justice. The Amalekites were solemnly devoted to destruction by the sentence of Heaven, specially communicated to the king of Israel, who, instead of performing his duty, suffered the people to bring away the spoils, while he spared the monarch to grace his own triumph. Saul did not want for excuses to palliate his fault, and even religion itself was urged as an apology for his partial discharge of the office allotted him; "the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal." Like too many who make great profession of their faith, this presumptuous man flattered himself that an exact observance of some things would atone for the breach of the commandment. But as Samuel truly explained the nature of real piety, contrasted with the affectation of it, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken, than the fat of rams." Nothing indeed can be more preposterous than the attempt to impose upon ourselves a persuasion that the practice of external ceremonies will be accepted instead of inward righteousness, and that the want of uniform virtue may be supplied by an affected zeal for God's service. This is a gross but common mockery of religion, and the mischief of it is clearly exposed in the history before us, from which we learn the necessity of entire submission and perfect obedience to all the Divine precepts. The harder any duty may seem, the stronger is our obligation to perform it; and whatever sacrifice it requires, must be immediately made without reluctance or reserve, though the object should be as tender as the right eye, and useful as the right hand. In the way of holiness, human reason must be guided by heavenly wisdom, and we

must be content to endure many things contrary to the desire of flesh and blood; otherwise, let our pretensions be what they may, the reflection of our Lord upon one of his half-disciples, will be descriptive of our character and condemnation: "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Luke, ix. 62.

APRIL THE TWENTIETH.

CONSECRATION OF DAVID.

(Samuel, xvi. 7.—*But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.*

NOTHING in general can be more erroneous than the decisions of human judgment upon the characters of mankind; and of this weakness the history before us affords a remarkable instance. Saul may be considered in a great measure as the choice of the nation, and it is observed of him, that when he first appeared in the midst of the congregation he was "higher than any of the people, from the shoulders and upwards," a recommendation in that age peculiarly strong in favour of one who was to lead the armies in person upon all occasions. Even Samuel seems to have paid less attention to the real disposition of the monarch than what might have been expected in so wise and good a man; for when compelled to pronounce the Divine judgment against him, the sentence was delivered with reluctance and followed by bitter lamentation. How unworthy Saul was of this partiality is evident from his whole conduct, and

from the apprehension of the Prophet that he should fall a victim to the tyrant's fury for obeying the command of God, who, in compassion to the infirmity of his servant, gave him directions for his deportment at Bethlehem, by observing which he would prevent suspicion and avoid offence. The act might have been performed in a public manner, but care was purposely taken to provide for the succession without weakening the fidelity of the people to the reigning sovereign, whose personal rights were secured though the sceptre was to pass at his death into another family. Next to religious obedience nothing is more strongly insisted upon in the sacred writings than an entire submission to the powers ordained of God ; and accordingly we find that the denunciation against Saul did not absolve the people from their allegiance to his government, though his temper was cruel and his example detestable.

When Samuel came to the house of Jesse and saw Eliab, the eldest son, he was ready to perform the ceremony immediately upon him, without any other intimation than the hasty conclusion which had been excited in his mind by the external figure of the person, that this must be the anointed of the Lord. But the secret monition of unerring wisdom corrected his error and restrained his hand, with this emphatic caution ; " Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature, because I have refused him : for the Lord seeth not as man seeth ; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." Seven of Jesse's sons having passed before the prophet without any expression of the Divine approbation, Samuel inquired whether these were all ; and being informed that the youngest was with the sheep, he caused David to be sent for, and on his entrance poured the horn of holy oil upon his head, in the midst of all his brethren. Thus, was David set apart by the special appoint-

ment of the Most High, for the government of Israel, and the Holy Spirit from this time rested upon him as his support and director. But though consecrated by the hands of the Divine messenger, neither that nor the spiritual unction with which he was favoured gave him any immediate authority, or the permission to take upon himself the sovereign power, while the throne was filled even by a wicked man. The youth, therefore, still continued in his pastoral employment, till called to court by the invitation of the king, who wanted the aid of minstrelsy to dispel his melancholy and to alleviate the horrors of an agonized conscience. But there was something more in the affliction of Saul than mere distress of mind, and the blessing imparted to David was of greater import than the enlargement of his mental faculties by an extraordinary skill in harmony. In the early part of Saul's history we read, that, after his departure from Samuel, his heart was changed, and that the gift of inspiration came upon him, so that his being among the prophets excited such general interest as to become a proverbial expression in Israel.

As the two conditions of this extraordinary man are related in the way of contrast, if by the first we are to understand his being under the guidance of heavenly illumination, the latter state must imply the desperation of apostasy produced by diabolical agency. That such was his disorder is evident from the tenor of the narrative, and the whole of his subsequent conduct shows that he was now under the domination of the evil spirit, here said to be from the Lord, which phrase is characteristic of separation and hostility, not of any missive power communicated by the Author of all good to the prince of darkness. This demoniacal frenzy of Saul was the consequence of his sinning against superior light, and continuing to follow his own perverse inclinations against the express injunction and direction of the Almighty.

There was a necessary connexion, therefore, between the offence and the punishment of this haughty monarch; for as he had wilfully rejected the government and counsels of God, it was but just that he should be left to the devices of his own malignant disposition. Among other points of instruction conveyed by this history, we learn the necessity of being cautious in forming an opinion of others from external appearances and occasional circumstances. It is our duty to wait with Christian forbearance and charity for the full developement of character, before we come to any decision upon the objects that fall within our observation. This is indeed the import of that sacred maxim which has been laid down for our guidance by the Teacher and Exemplar of all righteousness; "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." Matt. vii. 12.

APRIL THE TWENTY-FIRST.

DAVID AND GOLIATH.

1 Samuel, xvii. 45.—*Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts; the God of the armies of Israel; whom thou hast defied.*

THERE is a courage in religion, which the careless and the wicked may despise, but cannot imitate, though superficial minds often mistake affected bravery and constitutional warmth for mental fortitude. Saul did not want military prowess, and his valour was displayed on many occasions; yet he had not that spirit of true heroism, which, resulting from habitual confidence in God and the consciousness of

rectitude, raises the possessor above all dread of the world. So long as he obeyed the Divine monitions his conduct was exemplary, and success crowned his public efforts; but when he gave way to the impetuosity of his passions, he became wavering and distrustful, furious to his friends and afraid of his enemies. Thus it frequently happens that the most warlike spirit becomes the prey of secret apprehensions, and the man that was wont to meet death unappalled in the field of battle, shrinks from it with horror when eternity spreads its boundless expanse in awful silence full to his terrified view. Conscience then makes cowards of the fiercest, and so far is the remembrance of former achievements from yielding consolation, that the mind is embittered by the contrast; and that which forms the theme of national applause serves but to mortify the victor who knows that earthly glory affords no protection against the terrors of futurity. Soon after the election of Saul to the throne of Israel, he infused energy into all the tribes, and by the promptitude of his exertion he rescued Jabesh-Gilead from the vengeance of the Ammonites. But when he lost the Divine presence by his disobedience, a single adversary filled him with dismay, and the contagious influence of his fear spread consternation through the army. Forty days did the arrogant foe present himself in a menacing attitude, morning and evening, demanding an antagonist worthy of his might; but neither the zeal of patriotism nor the prospect of reward could stimulate any Israelite to brave the danger. Such was the state of affairs when David, obedient to the paternal mandate, visited the camp to inquire after the welfare of his brethren. On his arrival he beheld the champion of the Philistines; but that which struck the hardest soldiers with terror, only served to excite his curiosity and to rouse his indignation. He was astonished that a man could not be found among the people of

God to assert the honour of his country and the cause of religion against an insolent enemy and blasphemer. But the observations of David provoked the angry jealousy of his elder brother, who censured him bitterly for coming to see the battle, and treated him with ridicule on account of his employment. This was the person whose noble figure imposed upon the prophet Samuel till the internal monition of the Holy Spirit corrected his error, and convinced him that the mental character had no dependence upon the external form and stature. The Divine declaration was verified in this instance, when Eliab, who appears to have been as dastardly as his companions, abused David for his kindness, and taunted him for his intrepidity. Whoever enters upon a religious life must expect to meet with much obloquy from an unbelieving and censorious world; and it will be well if the opposition he has to encounter does not arise principally in the circle of his nearest connexions, when the force of that prediction will be keenly felt; "A man's foes shall be they of his own household." Matt. x. 36. The deportment of David when he was so ungenerously used by his brother, presents an example for our imitation in all cases where illiberal censure is passed upon the motives by which we are actuated in the conscientious discharge of our duty. Instead of returning railing for railing, the pious youth rested his defence upon the rectitude of his conduct and the righteousness of the cause. He might have recriminated with severity upon the want of candour and courage in his brethren; but he avoided every expression that had a tendency to irritate their tempers, and he prudently contented himself with a short answer, as best calculated to avert wrath. Yet he still remained firm and undaunted, nor could even the remonstrances of the king shake his confidence in God, and the assurance of success which that confidence inspired. It

was this which made him put off the cumbrous armour of Saul, sensible that he stood in need of no other defence than the Divine security, nor of any better weapons than the direction of Heaven. As the present occurrence was one of an extraordinary and supernatural kind, it of course supplies no rule for common life; because the use of means is established in the whole order of Providence for the government of the world and the instruction of man. The history, however, teaches us to avoid mingling spiritual and worldly things, and to abstain carefully from those reasonings on sacred truths, which are drawn from sensual feelings and the mere devices of earthly wisdom. When called upon to resist the enemy of our souls, we must lay aside the subtilty of genius and the sophistry of learning, which are invariably blended with pride, if we hope to succeed against one that has all the refinements of casuistry at his command, and knows well how to bend every species of wit and argument to his purpose. Our blessed Saviour, in his conflict with the prince of darkness, repelled all his attacks by passages from Holy Writ, thereby showing us the only sure method to be adopted in every case of temptation, of which also the advice of the Apostle is explanatory; "Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." Eph. vi. 17. Thus armed with Divine power, David, when he met his tremendous adversary, heard his menaces unmoved, and replied to them in the calm and dignified language of religion: "All this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands." The victory which followed confirmed the assurance of faith, affording a demonstrative proof to all Israel that the weakest believer in the cause of truth, is stronger than the gigantic champions of error, and more powerful

than an army whose sole dependence is upon natural strength and worldly wisdom. From the whole of this remarkable history we also learn how impotent sin as well as its author is, when resisted with an unmixed zeal for the glory of God, and in an absolute dependence upon his sovereign grace. While the fearful and unbelieving magnify the smallest evils into insurmountable obstacles, and thus become slaves to sin through cowardice, the Christian warrior, who goes forth like David in the power of the Lord, sees Lucifer fall at his feet, and all the objects raised to scare the imagination, vanishing as the shadows of the night before the dawn of day. As the enemy gains all his advantage from our fears, so when, with an entire devotion of soul, we look upwards for life and light, to the Source of all being and perfection, we shall derive from thence sufficient vigour to overcome the difficulties and opposition which the devil, the world, and the flesh, may cast in our way.

By this continual reliance upon the Divine goodness, and the steadfastness of faith in the promises of God, the apostolical rule will be made comfortable to our minds in all conditions of life; "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." 1 John, iv. 18.

Let us not impute our own sloth and timidity to the power of the evil spirit and the want of Divine assistance, for nothing can stand against a holy resolution; and whenever that is formed in the heart, it will be so strengthened as to become invincible. "Blessed then is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." James, i. 12.

APRIL THE TWENTY-SECOND.

THE CONDUCT OF DAVID.

1 Samuel, xviii. 14, 15.—*And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him. Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him.*

RELIGIOUS prudence is very different from that wily spirit which many are apt to admire as the distinction of a superior understanding and characteristic of a well-regulated temper. When our Lord advised his followers to be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matt. x. 16), he laid down a plain criterion to prevent men from falling into the common error of substituting cunning for wisdom; a mistake which has led many into notions and practices completely at variance with the simplicity of the Gospel. The history of David, before his accession to the throne, and while he was an object of persecution, affords an excellent illustration of this precept. Though young in years and enterprising in disposition, he was not elated by his extraordinary achievement which gave deliverance to Israel, and procured him the applause of the nation. So far was he from being proud and assuming on account of his victory, that when he found it excited the gloomy apprehensions of Saul, he made it his constant study to behave with humility, and to avoid every thing that, by adding to his own popularity, might increase the jealousy of the monarch. In this behaviour we observe not only the true spirit of self-command, but a noble liberality and forbearance very unusual at such an age, and rendered more remarkable by the provocations of Saul which might seem to have warranted keen resentment and to have justified the

language of warm reproach. But true wisdom is gentle in disposition and patient of injuries, intent upon studying how to govern the thoughts of the heart and to regulate the actions of life. Instead of devising methods to avenge its wrongs and to distress its adversaries ; it endeavours to profit by the ill-treatment which it receives, and to correct any disorder that remains in the mind and affections, by turning into lessons of instruction the evils with which it has to contend. Hardly any thing can be more erroneous than to place wisdom on a level with natural science, and to confound its objects with the pursuits of the men who are commonly denominated philosophers. Commendable as the application to human science may be, it is often found to increase vanity and to make its votaries restless, while it draws them away from the simplicity of religious truth to indulge in speculation, which neither add to the usefulness nor the happiness of man. He that looks narrowly into himself, and considers the complex variety of motives and principles which act upon his thoughts and resolutions, will find matter enough to require constant application and perpetual watchfulness, that he may be enabled to hold his faith with a good conscience.

As this world is only a probationary one, it is evident that nothing it contains can be really valuable unless it contributes in some way or other to fit and prepare us for that which is to come. That knowledge, therefore, which has no relation to the future existence, by correcting vice and adding to the stock of virtue, is to be regarded in no higher light than an agreeable amusement, allowable on many accounts for rational relaxation and the temporary exercise of the faculties, but becoming a snare and sin when made the sole business of life. Our information concerning the next stage of being is unavoidably obscure, but sufficient is imparted to

convince us that the soul can receive no advancement of dignity and enjoyment, without a proper application of its talents and opportunities in its previous sphere of operation. The various arts to which men attach so much importance here below, will either be totally forgotten or, treated as the mere sports of childhood in the higher region of mental power; and they who were distinguished for nothing more than their superior excellence in such things, will sink beneath the plain and simple understandings that formerly excited their pity and contempt. This is forcibly expressed by the Apostle in his beautiful description of Divine grace, which "beareth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things. This immortal spring of love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." 1 Cor. xiii. 7, 8. Such is the wisdom that cometh from above, blending fortitude with meekness, prudence with generosity, and zeal with charity. In affliction it gath'ers strength from every stroke, and rises above the world by the very means contrived for its depression; while it enjoys prosperity with moderation, and diffuseth its blessings with liberality. The wise man, like David, walks warily, but without deception; and if he is in a public situation, he abhors those arts which are commonly employed to gain applause, being as studious to avoid wounding the feelings of others as of increasing his own vanity. Thus he disarms envy, and, in the language of Scripture, "heaps coals of fire on the head of his enemy" (Rom. xii. 20); either melting down animosity by courtesy, or by the prudence of behaviour preventing it from breaking out into acts of violence. It was by such a spirit and deportment that David gained an advantage over Saul, who was afraid of the virtues which he could not imitate; and it is the glory of the righteous in

every condition of life, that however bitterly they may be reproached and vilified, still the superiority of their character is felt even by their enemies. Whether, therefore, by this exercise of patience and perseverance in well-doing, they succeed in making friends of their oppressors and calumniators, or not; they find abundant comfort in the subjection of every troublesome passion, till the soul obtains a complete conquest over all the opposition that can disturb its quiet and impede its progress in holiness. The believer who makes this use of his trials, and endeavours to withdraw from the external causes of agitation to rest in hope upon the promises of his Saviour, comes to an experimental knowledge of the reason why crosses and persecutions are indispensable in the Christian life; and then he enjoys the full force of that gracious assurance, which follows the declaration; "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John, xvi. 33.

APRIL THE TWENTY-THIRD.

THE DISTRESS OF DAVID.

1 Samuel, xx. 3 — *Truly as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death,*

THIS world is a school of moral discipline, where affliction forms an essential part of that system which is necessary for our present improvement, as preparatory to the attainment of future happiness. The righteous in all ages have been exercised in this course, and David had such abundant practice in it, that though for the time he found his trials heavy and

his condition almost hopeless, yet in the end he could be thankful for the variety of his experience, which brought him to acknowledge the benefits it had produced: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes." Ps. cxix. 71. The oracles of life are only known to any efficient purpose, when by the application of them to our particular temper and circumstances, we find the influence of their authority over our thoughts, and are led by them to pursue the great ends for which we were placed in this state of probation. A long continuance in ease and prosperity, so far from inducing that habit of watchfulness and industry which is required of accountable agents, who have temptations to overcome and virtues to attain, is apt to produce indifference to evil and wrong ideas of good. Sensible objects and worldly pleasures are oftentimes very alluring, even to those who, convinced of their vanity, earnestly seek for the treasures of that wisdom which endureth for ever. It is evident then that the true value of every thing must be estimated according to its permanency, and the tendency which it has to increase our satisfaction in every successive stage of rational existence, and consequently to fit our minds for the highest degree of intellectual enjoyment of which they may be rendered capable. All that conduces to fix our affections upon perishable things, and to restrain those exertions which are proper to prepare us for the future life, must be viewed with jealousy and checked with zeal, otherwise the soul will be in danger of becoming supine by indulgence and enfeebled by sloth. Adversity then is infinitely more advantageous than an uninterrupted series of prosperous scenes, because the mind being cleared by it from all the false impressions of transitory delights, is disposed to regard with serious steadfastness the realities of eternity. When the two states are set in opposition to each other, the con-

sideration of the brevity of life will allay the severity of trouble, and cast a deep gloom over the season of festivity ; for while it is a consolation to reflect that the acuteness of suffering is momentary, the pleasures of the world are embittered as they are enjoyed, by seeing them withering before us to revive no more. As prosperity is too favourable to the natural pride of the human heart, so affliction tends to abate that vain confidence which is the great obstacle to all improvement. The man who relies upon his own understanding has no disposition to receive or to profit by the instructions of others ; but when he is embarrassed in his plans and distressed in his means, he feels anxious for counsel, and will even listen to reproof. It is the same thing when the order of Providence brings us into difficulties from which human wisdom can contrive no deliverance, and against the pressure of which the powers of reason are insufficient to apply any remedy. We can then submit in silence to the exposition of faults, and endeavour to gather relief and hope from the examination of errors. Out of follies that are past we are willing to derive regulations for the future conduct ; and thus the humiliation of vanity is made instrumental to our correction and instruction in righteousness. But the most important design of affliction, as far as it regards the immediate subjects of its visitation here, is to strengthen their minds against the terrors of death and the invisible world. There is something peculiarly awful in the view of dissolution, and that change of being which will determine the happiness or misery of man for ever ; whatever therefore contributes to disperse the darkness which clouds the prospect of eternity, and to render the mind familiar with a situation to which it must inevitably arrive, should be welcomed as the messenger of friendship, and not be dreaded as the enemy of our peace. All the splendour of time.

fades away with age, and the glories which so much attract the admiration of men, shall sink into obscurity.

Riches and honours are insecure possessions at the very best ; and this reflection upon the uncertainty of our enjoyments, with the assurance of a speedy separation from them, is that which increases the fear of death and spreads a deeper gloom over the horrors of the grave. Now affliction reverses this scene, and by exhibiting the world as a shadow, brings the soul to contemplate that state where alone true and substantial joys are to be found. Instead then of repining under the yoke, and complaining of it as too intolerable to be borne, we should account it a privilege, which duly estimated, is the distinction belonging to the chosen of God. Like David, it is a blessing to be trained in this course at an early period of life ; for painful as the various trials may be to which we are called, they will, if endured with faith and patience, work out for us a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory. When these visitations of mercy have the effect of bringing the two worlds together, so that we can say, " there is but a step between us and death ;" the comparison of what is felt with that which is promised, will correct the eagerness of our tempers, allay the ardour of our earthly pursuits, and wean us from an undue attachment to the things of time and sense. We shall then confess that to secure an eternal inheritance, the path which was trod by the saints of old, and sanctified by the Lord of Life, is the safest and most honourable, however unpleasant it may be to flesh and blood, or repugnant to the general sentiments of mankind. Though dark and thorny at the beginning, it secures us from the most dangerous snares and temptations that can possibly befall us in this state of pilgrimage ; on which account, if for no other, we shall have cause to adore

the Divine goodness for thus separating us from the entanglements of the world, that we may become fit associates of intelligences, refined from sensual perceptions, and exalted to the purity of perfect love. This grateful impression will raise our minds above all opposition and trouble, so that amidst the most fearful circumstances and bitterest persecutions, the declaration of the Apostle, which to the inconsiderate and unbelieving appears as a paradox, will be our solace and exultation; "for unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." Philipp: i. 29.

APRIL THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

RELIGIOUS FRIENDSHIP.

1 Samuel, xxiii. 16.—*And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God.*

NEXT to the complaint of the uncertainty of human life, and the troubles with which it is checquered, nothing has been so generally the subject of lamentation as the want of friendship among mankind. The pretensions to this virtue are indeed universal, because such is the constitution of our nature, that society is essential to the comfort and desires of every man, and mutual dependence impels him to seek for direction in difficulty, assistance in distress, and co-operation in enterprize. But as credulity and design will be found to pervade all associations that are formed with a view to personal convenience and temporary gratification, it ought not to excite wonder that disappointment should dissolve what vanity and interest cemented. The basis of union having neither permanent principles nor fixed ob-

jects, will necessarily be weakened by the flux of time, and be changed by those varying occurrences which produce new sensations of life and open different prospects to the imagination. Hence it is that old connexions pass away as the occasions to which they owed their influence cease to operate, or as the remembrance of them fades from the mind. Man in his progress becomes in many respects another creature from what he was at the outset of his career, and therefore no one ought to murmur when he perceives similar mutations in others to those which, upon examination, he finds to have passed within his own breast. Instead then of condemning the rest of the world for the failure of our expectations, it would better become us to look narrowly into the grounds on which they were founded; and if it shall appear that our motives had in them any mixture of vanity and selfishness, we shall see cause to recall the censure and bestow it upon ourselves. That true friendship is uncommon cannot be denied, but there is this plain reason to be assigned for it, that as we are apt to be mistaken in our own affections, it is natural for us to be equally, if not more, deceived in those of others. Still the virtue has an existence among men, though we are so often imposed upon by what bears the semblance of it, as almost to despair of finding the genuine blessing upon earth. But in truth it is a plant of heavenly origin, which may be distinguished from the capricious partialities and fleeting attachments of the world, by its spiritual tendency and continual inclination to promote the eternal welfare of all men, especially the objects of its nearest intimacy and esteem. While the sympathy which engages general admiration decays with the revolution of years, or is suddenly destroyed by the violence of passion, this lowly and unostentatious principle becomes more vigorous by age, and diffuses its fragrance chiefly in

the season of distress. Its influence is expanded, and its energy is increased, by the various means which try the integrity and confidence of man, in situations where ordinary strength is vain and resolution of little avail. When afflictions multiply and the prospect deepens in gloom, the value of true friendship is sensibly felt in the direction which it gives to another and a better state of things. All that baffles the skill, confounds the power, and lessens the disposition of the tenderest minds to afford solace where it is anxiously sought, gives force to piety and effect to its exertions. When the nearest companions and most affectionate relations shrink back from dangers which they cannot avert, and view with silent compassion sufferings which they are conscious of their utter inability to alleviate, the humblest believer, in whom the "love of God casteth out all fear," is enabled to counsel the wise, to support the weak, and to console the afflicted. The several instances of friendship recorded in the Sacred History are all of this sublime description, and the proof of their exalted character is stated; either in the circumstances under which they were formed, or in the events by which they were distinguished. One of the most beautiful and instructive of these examples is related in the behaviour of Jonatban, the son of Saul, towards David, whom he shielded from the fury of his father at the risk of his own life, though he knew that in so doing he protected the very person who stood between him and the throne. So far from having any thing to hope from David, this amiable prince had the greatest reason in the world to look upon him with jealousy, and to dread his ascendancy, as menacing the personal safety of the monarch and that of his family. But what human policy would have considered as a justifiable plea for cutting off so dangerous a rival, proved in this case a motive with

Jonathan for the preservation of his friend. Many opportunities occurred in which David might easily have been destroyed; but instead of taking the slightest advantage against him, this exalted youth gave the distressed exile warning of the perils which surrounded him, and advice for the regulation of his conduct. The last interview which they had was rendered remarkable by the faith and generosity of Jonathan, who hearing that his friend lay concealed in the wilderness of Ziph, where he was closely pressed by his pursuers, hastened immediately to the place of his retreat, "and strengthened his hand in God."

The spirit of love overcomes all difficulties, and the man who is under its gracious impulse arises cheerfully at the call of conscience, and goes forth to the discharge of duty without calculating the probabilities of success against the force of immediate danger. Thus it was with Jonathan, who had every thing to apprehend from the resentment of his father, and the certainty of losing the crown if David prevailed; yet unmindful of these considerations, which might seem to have furnished sufficient grounds for joining in the pursuit of his competitor, this excellent person renounced all the prospects of temporal grandeur, in submission to the righteous decrees of Providence. His obedience to the Divine dispensations was not that passive disposition which too many are apt to regard as the extent of faith and patience; but it was an active principle, desirous of operating in the great work, and of facilitating its progress, to the entire disregard of future loss or present inconvenience. Religion was the root of this alliance, and therefore the parties so united became closer in affection as the world, by crosses and temptations, endeavoured to separate them. David forgot the cruelty of Saul in the kindness of Jonathan; and the heir to the throne of Israel gladly yielded the

splendour of royalty to the virtues of his friend. In the temper and conduct of these persons we may perceive that the only basis of virtuous union is a belief of the Divine promises, and a mutual reference of all our concerns to the will of God; "from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." Ephes. iv. 16.

APRIL THE TWENTY-FIFTH.

THE OFFENCE OF NABAL.

1 Samuel, xxv. 39.—*When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, Blessed be the Lord, that hath pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal; and hath kept his servant from evil; for the Lord hath returned the wickedness of Nabal upon his own head.*

Few virtues are more strongly recommended by precept and example in the Holy Scriptures than hospitality, the exercise of which is represented as having been followed by the manifest favour of Heaven; while the breach of it never failed to be marked by some signal token of the Divine displeasure. In allusion to the numerous instances of benevolence recorded in the Sacred History, and as an incentive to the same course of liberality, the Apostle gives this advice: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Heb. xiii. 2. But the law of God provided for the discharge of this duty by several express statutes; and there were certain seasons when the people were enjoined to open their hands

wide according to the means which they possessed, in bounty to the helpless and the needy, the stranger and the destitute. On such occasions, which were commonly at those periods of the year when the gifts of Providence called for a grateful return, charity was regarded as involving more than an act of justice, the want of which was therefore treated as a public offence. The consideration of this prevalent sentiment, and of the practice founded upon it, will serve in a great measure to account for the resentment of David, on receiving the most virulent abuse instead of gratitude from the man whose property he had assiduously watched and protected. The obligations of Nabal were fully acknowledged by his own servants, whose address to Abigail expressed the character of their master, and the favours bestowed upon him by David and his followers. "The men," said they, "were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we any thing as long as we were conversant with them, when we were with them in the fields. They were a wall unto us, both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do: for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household: for he is such a son of Belial that a man cannot speak to him." The request of David at a time of general festivity was very moderate, and far below the value of the services rendered by him to Nabal; who was not contented with a simple refusal, but added to it the foulest calumny and most injurious reproach. This man was well acquainted with the rank of the person to whom he was so greatly indebted; and he knew also the occasion of his present distress, yet he had the baseness to treat David as a runaway servant, and the wickedness to stigmatize him as the ringleader of rebellion. Such opprobrious language and malignant charges could

hardly fail to rouse the feelings of any man ; but the injury was aggravated by many circumstances, and rendered peculiarly poignant by the tendency which it had to wound the reputation of one who was generally known to be the object of persecution, because the Lord had declared that he should be king over Israel. We have contemplated with pleasure the exalted piety of Jonathan, who readily renounced all his own pretensions to the succession, in meek submission to the Divine decrees. Now Nabal was not ignorant of that which his own family thoroughly understood ; his conduct, therefore, amounted to something still more criminal than mere want of charity and gratitude, for it was an impious outrage against the declared will of God. The illiberality would have been extremely provoking, even if it had not been attended by brutal insolence ; but directed as it was to the messengers of a prince in the midst of a numerous assembly, it tended to lessen him in the estimation of his own people, and to spread an evil report of him through the land. There was then much to excuse the warmth of David, though the hasty resolution formed by him against the house of Nabal cannot be justified. He had however still much to learn in the way of obedience, and that government of his passions which was necessary to fit him for the rule of a kingdom. The presence and judgment of Abigail interposed to save her family from destruction, and the future sovereign of Israel from the reproach of his own conscience and the just censure of mankind. David had the good sense and virtue to see his error, and to correct it immediately in the presence of his troops, who were full of ardour to punish an insult which each man among them considered as having been offered to himself. This forbearance of their commander was therefore the more meritorious, because it was displayed at the hazard of incurring their displeasure.

when they were intent upon avenging his cause and their own wrongs.

The fate of Nabal, who died suddenly through horror of the danger from which he had just escaped, filled the heart of David with gratitude for having been providentially stopped in the career of evil, and prevented from pursuing the sanguinary purposes of revenge. To this mercy he seems to allude in that remarkable passage of his devotional compositions: "Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity; and let me not eat of their dainties. Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities." Ps. cxli. 4, 5.

APRIL THE TWENTY-SIXTH.

THE LOYALTY OF DAVID.

I Samuel, xxvi. 23.—*The Lord render to every man his righteousness, and his faithfulness: for the Lord delivered thee into my hand to-day; but I would not stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed.*

THERE is nothing in the behaviour of David more amiable and instructive than his fidelity as a subject during the life of his inveterate persecutor. On two particular occasions he manifested uncommon generosity, when to all appearance Saul was providentially thrown into his hands. So great indeed was the temptation the first time, that the followers of David urged him to embrace the opportunity by this consideration, "Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy

into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee." 1 Sam. xxiv. 4. But such was the piety of this excellent man, that he not only rejected their counsel, but felt contrition for having only cut off the skirt of the royal garment. The power of faith, and the deep sense of duty, supported him in this great trial, and gave him a conquest far more permanent and glorious than could have been attained by any advantage over his enemy. Then it was that he felt and breathed forth this fervent sentiment of confidence and gratitude to Heaven, when his pursuers, insensible of their danger, lay wholly at his mercy: "They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. My heart is fixed, O God; my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise." Ps. lvii. 6, 7. Unmindful of the kindness which he had received, Saul still continued to pursue David with deadly hatred, and being informed that the object of his dread and malice lay in the wilderness of Ziph, he went and surrounded the place of his concealment with a large force. In this situation the king and his whole army fell into a deep sleep, which was evidently a supernatural visitation, and as such it appeared to Abishai, who offered to smite Saul to the earth. The generous fugitive, however, was satisfied with taking away the spear and cruse which lay at the head of the monarch, and then retired to the impregnable pass in the rocks, where his own men were stationed. Here David cried to Abner, the captain of the host, and reproached him for his want of vigilance, saying, "Art not thou a valiant man? and who is like to thee in Israel? Wherefore then hast thou not kept thy lord the king? for there came one of the people in to destroy the king thy lord. This thing is not good that thou hast done. As the Lord liveth, ye are worthy to die, because ye have

not kept your master, the Lord's anointed." His address to Saul himself was equally pathetic and pungent: "If the Lord have stirred thee up against me, he will accept an offering: but if they be the children of men, cursed will they be before the Lord; for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, Go and serve other gods." Having brought Saul to acknowledge once more the folly of his conduct, David referred his cause in this exalted appeal to the sovereign Disposer of all events: "The Lord render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the Lord delivered thee into my hand to-day; but I would not stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed. And behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the Lord, and let him deliver me out of all tribulation." That his conduct was the effect of religious principles, is evident from the restraint which he laid upon himself and his associates, when circumstances occurred to get rid of all his troubles by destroying the author of them. But though his own personal safety was continually in danger, and though he had full assurance that the Divine favour was withdrawn from the apostate king, still David chose rather to suffer oppression and to endure the miseries of exile, than take up arms against the sovereign power. If resistance and insurrection had been lawful, David could have offered many strong reasons for his opposition to the government. He might have taken a firm stand upon the consecration which he had received from Samuel; and in addition to this, he could allege many important services rendered to the nation. Public grievances and private wrongs were so notorious, that distress and disaffection spread throughout the kingdom, and numbers of the oppressed gathered from all parts to the strong hold on the frontier,

where the fugitive chief had fixed his residence. To an ambitious and vengeful spirit, these were certainly powerful inducements for attempting a revolution; and the means of accomplishing such an object were formidable; for while the cruelty and sacrilege of Saul had weakened the affections of his subjects, the valour and generosity of David endeared him to all parties, and his alliance was even courted by the neighbouring princes. But neither the provocations of his adversary, nor the solicitations of his friends, could shake the loyalty of this excellent person, who knew that no device can controul the dispensations of Infinite Wisdom, or accelerate the designs which are involved in the mystery of Providence. It was his glory to be established in the conviction of this eternal truth; that the principle of obedience is uniform, and the duty straight and unchangeable: not to be lengthened or shortened according to man's feelings and convenience, but becoming more binding upon conscience as the incitements to insubordination multiply, and the pressure of evil tends to beget impatience. Faith in the promises, made David more submissive to the yoke of affliction and circumspect over all his actions, that his oppressor might not have occasion to reproach him with forming sinister designs against the peace of the kingdom. He was persuaded that the Almighty would accomplish his own word in due season, and according to the fittest methods, without being assisted by the officious interference of shortsighted zeal and presumptuous policy. This was his conclusion when advised to take another course by those who conceived that a tyrant and persecutor had forfeited all claim to respect: "As the Lord liveth," was the dignified reply of this enlightened prince, "the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle and perish."

APRIL THE TWENTY-SEVENTH.

THE WITCH OF ENDOR.

1 Samuel, xxviii. 13.—*And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth.*

CRITICISM has made very free with the Sacred History, on account of that extraordinary transaction which distinguished the close of Saul's eventful life; when driven to despair by the want of Divine instruction, he had recourse to unlawful means, that he might obtain information respecting the war in which he was engaged with the Philistines. In the ardour of his zeal, and when he was under the influence of religious impressions, Saul enforced the Mosaical statute with rigour against all who practised enchantments; but being surrounded with danger, and destitute of counsel, he made inquiry after a woman who dealt with familiar spirits. Hearing that there was a person of this description at Endor, the unhappy monarch repaired, accompanied only by two attendants, in disguise, to that place, the same night. With great difficulty the woman was prevailed upon to employ her art; but when she actually saw Samuel, her fears overcame whatever confidence she might previously have had in her supernatural knowledge and power. The awful vision was so different from what she expected, and beyond the utmost reach of her pretended skill, that she became terrified, and instantly concluded that the inquirer could be no other than the king of Israel. This inference was obvious to one who must at the first application have suspected that her principal visitor was a man of no common rank, which idea became confirmed by the circumstance of his calling for Samuel, to whom persons of this woman's character had a great aversion.

but when, without her magical influence, a figure arose before her in solemn majesty, all these suspicions and apprehensions were concentrated and fixed upon one object, with whose tyranny she was well acquainted, and whose vengeance she had therefore every reason to dread. Saul finding himself discovered, and perceiving from the agitation of the woman that something very unusual had happened, gave her an assurance of his protection, and demanded to know the cause of her alarm. The reply was remarkable, "I saw gods ascending out of the earth:" and being asked of what form, she gave such an exact representation of Samuel, that Saul recognized the prophet by her description. So far it may be said, that craft and credulity might have conspired to impose upon the imagination; but the colloquy which followed exceeded the power of ingenuity, and was too historical to be the mere operation of fancy. The spectral appearance spoke with the same dignity which had usually distinguished the remonstrances and rebukes of the living seer. Saul was reminded of his gross apostasy and disobedience; informed again of the Divine decree, which had transferred the dominion to David; and what was more than all, the unhappy king received warning of his approaching fate. Such a series of heavy charges and denunciations could not have been the device of an impostor, who knew her own life was in danger; for one of that cast would have reversed the scene to secure her own safety. But as the woman was not the author of predictions, which were against her interest, so neither can they be justly ascribed to an evil spirit; for whatever be the capacity of such beings, they are limited, and extend not to any knowledge or influence over things that are strictly future, and actually dependent upon the will of God. Here the inquirer was not only condemned for his irreligion, which must be considered as a

very inconsistent reproof from the prince of darkness; but two prophecies were delivered, one declaring that the kingdom was given to David, who did not enjoy it till two years afterwards; and the other, that by to-morrow night Saul and his two sons should be numbered with the dead. That it was a spiritual intelligence which held communication with Saul, is plain from the dialogue; and it is equally clear that this being appeared as Samuel, and was taken for him by the man who was best qualified to judge whether what he saw and heard corresponded with all that he remembered of the venerable minister, whose figure and voice were so familiar to him, that no attempts to imitate them could impose upon his senses. The author of the Book of Ecclesiasticus, who was certainly well acquainted with the history and belief of the antient Jewish church, says in his eulogy upon Samuel, "After his death he prophesied, and showed the king his end, and lifted up his voice from the earth in prophecy, to blot out the wickedness of the people." Ch. xlv. 20.

This last observation is of importance, as giving a very substantial reason for that which some overnice critics have endeavoured to explain away by refinements infinitely more difficult than the literal sense of the story. The evil example of the monarch brought on a general depravity of manners, and the cessation of the holy oracle was succeeded by the darkness of infidelity. It was the duty of Saul to have resigned the crown to the Power from whom he received it; but instead of this, he strove to overthrow the decree of Heaven, by endeavouring to murder the virtuous object of its favour. Thus he went on multiplying transgressions and increasing the national corruption, till at last he filled up the cup of his iniquity, by impiously seeking diabolical assistance when he should have humbled himself before the

sovereign Disposer of all events, in penitence and prayer. But the means which he used to obtain relief, proved the instrument of his punishment, in ratifying the sentence already passed, and warning him of its speedy execution, by a voice from the dead. This wonderful occurrence had also the farther end of making generally known the dreadful doom of Saul, with the cause of his dereliction, and consequently of preparing the people for a ready submission to the sceptre of David, whose sublime language might properly have been applied to this occasion: "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain. Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God: let all that be round about him bring presents unto Him that ought to be feared. He shall cut off the spirit of princes; he is terrible to the kings of the earth." Ps. lxxvi. 10—12.

APRIL THE TWENTY-EIGHTH.

THE JUSTICE OF DAVID.

- 1 Samuel, xxx. 23, 24.—*Then said David, Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the Lord hath given us, who hath preserved us, and delivered the company that came against us into our hand. For who will hearken unto you in this matter? But as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his be that carrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike.*

THE history of David abounds with instructive incidents, illustrative of the great principles of moral duty in the various relations of life. Among other eminent qualities which adorned his character, the love of justice was remarkably conspicuous, and he

displayed it on different occasions at the risk of his own safety, and in opposition to the sentiments of his adherents. An instance of this occurred at the close of his exile, when he was called by Achish, king of Gath, to march with him against Saul. This was a most critical and distressing conjuncture, as it reduced the Israelites who followed David to the necessity of assisting in the subjugation of their country, or of incurring the vengeance of the people with whom they dwelt. But the jealousy of the Philistines saved David and his followers from the afflicting dilemma, and they were sent back to the city which had been allotted to them for an asylum. The fears of the princes, and the friendly language in which their resolution was communicated by Achish, were honourable testimonies to the conduct of the fugitive chief, to whom no objections could be made, but what arose from the sense of his virtue and valour. Great was the satisfaction of the Israelites, no doubt, on being dismissed from so unpleasant a service; but their joy was dreadfully reversed on finding that the Amalekites had taken the advantage of their absence to spoil the city and carry away the women and children captives. In the height of their grief they rashly charged David with being the cause of the calamity, though he was distressed as much as themselves by the loss of his family. But as lamentation was useless, and remonstrance unavailing, the prudent commander immediately marched with the most active of his troops in quest of the marauders. The urgency of the case required uncommon exertion; but having been fatigued by a long journey before this new adventure, part of the company fainted, and could proceed no farther. David, however, with the remainder pushed forward with that eagerness which the hope of delivering all that was dear to them could inspire; and by the direction of an Egyptian they were enabled to fall upon the Amalek-

ites, who being wholly unprepared for an attack, were defeated with great slaughter. Having obtained all the captives and the plunder, the conquerors returned towards home, and on the way rejoined their comrades. Here the spirit of covetousness betrayed itself in a combination of the victors to defraud their brethren of all participation in the recovered property, except granting to each man his wife and children, who already belonged to him by the law of nature. These men were actuated by the narrow principle, that the personal danger which they had encountered, gave them an absolute right to all the spoils; without considering that the misfortune of their companions was sustained in the public service, and might equally have befallen themselves. The generous spirit of their leader was roused by this selfish resolution, and he not only determined, that all who had been engaged in the expedition should share alike, but he afterwards with great wisdom and liberality established the rule as a statute and an ordinance for Israel: "As his part is who goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarryeth by the stuff." This regulation, and the law founded upon it, indicated a mind raised above all fear of the world, and firmly fixed in the principles of righteousness. Before this expedition the people were about to stone David as the author of the calamity which had happened in their absence, but it is said "he encouraged himself in the Lord his God." The same confidence carried him gloriously through the enterprize, and enabled him afterwards to gain a greater triumph in destroying a formidable confederacy, the design of which was to rob the poor, because they were helpless. In taking the part of the weak, therefore, against the strong, David showed his intrepidity and benevolence, the greatness of his views and the tenderness of his heart. This is the line which every man ought to

adopt when interest, respect for the world, or sense of personal security, combine to recommend a temporizing policy in matters of conscience. The rule of rectitude will neither admit of deviation nor compromise; and as that person is flagrantly unjust who endeavours to profit in the smallest degree by the weakness or the necessities of others, so that man is far from being upright, let his profession be what it will, who can behold oppression in silence and regard affliction with indifference. Whatever present satisfaction such persons may derive from a course to which they falsely give the name of caution and prudence, it will pass away with the immediate perception of its advantage, while the patient and the liberal mind will treasure up, amidst unmerited contempt and obloquy, an inheritance for futurity. Well then might David say at the close of his life, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful and lendeth; and his seed is blessed." Ps. xxxvii. 25, 26.

APRIL THE TWENTY-NINTH.

DAVID'S LAMENTATION.

2 Samuel, i. 27.—*How are the mighty fallen,
and the weapons of war perished!*

THIS sublime composition is not only admirable for its poetical beauty, but discovers what is of still greater importance, the exalted spirit of religion in one who, after being so long the object of persecution, might without any just charge of impropriety have tuned his harp to the note of praise for deliverance from a cruel enemy. The principal troubles of David were now at an end, and nothing hindered

him from returning again to his native place ; to the bosom of domestic comfort, and the sanctuary of his God. He had also this consolation, that the death of Saul was an event of war, after an obstinate conflict with the open enemies of his country. It was well for the peace and reputation of the exiled prince, that the fears of the Philistines obliged him and his followers to be dismissed from the service of the king of Gath, otherwise some reflection might probably have been made upon their concern in the national disaster. But neither calumny nor suspicion could excite a murmur throughout Israel against men who at the time of this battle were hazarding their own lives in the pursuit of the Amalekites, from whom they recovered what these plunderers had seized and carried off during the contest between the two powers. On all accounts, then the banished Israelites had cause enough to rejoice in the destruction of the tyrant, whose cruelties had obliged them to seek a refuge among strangers ; and they had equal reason to expect the most welcome reception in their respective tribes, after so many hardships ; while the chief of these wanderers could scarcely contemplate this change in his condition without feeling some degree of exultation, mixed with compassion for the fate of his countrymen and friends. That David was impressed with gratitude to the Author of mercy for having preserved him through so many troubles, and opened his way at last in so unexpected a manner to the throne, cannot be doubted. As most of his Psalms are illustrative of some remarkable periods in his life, we may justly conceive the following passages to be expressive of his sentiments upon this great turn in his affairs : " O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard : which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved. For thou, O God, hast proved us : thou hast tried us, as

silver is tried. Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidest affliction upon our loins. Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou hast brought us out into a wealthy place. I will go into thy house with burnt offerings; I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken when I was in trouble." Ps. lxxvi. 8—14.

But though the heart of this excellent person was raised by the deliverance which he had experienced, and though he directed his people to glorify the name of the Lord, who had done such great things for them; the effusion of piety was blended with generous pity for the wretched fate of the deceased monarch and his gallant son. Instead of rejoicing at the miserable end of Saul, or even treating it calmly as the just judgment of God upon him for his impiety, David caused an Amalekite to be slain who thought to gain his favour by pretending that the unhappy king of Israel had fallen by his hand. This act of magnanimity in punishing judicially a man who expected thanks and rewards for the report of what he concluded must be highly acceptable to the successor of Saul, places the character of David in a brilliant light; and the elegant elegy which he appears to have publicly delivered upon the royal sufferers exhibits a beautiful picture of his exquisite genius, and one still more striking, of his exalted virtue. If the poem be read without any knowledge of the preceding history, the touching simplicity of the style will naturally lead the mind to conclude that the author had sustained a considerable loss in the melancholy catastrophe of two persons, who were his most affectionate friends. All the errors of Saul are thrown into oblivion, while his martial qualities and magnificence are brought forward with great effect, to make a due impression upon an assembly of warriors. Every thing that could possibly be said

to his advantage is represented in the most forcible language; and where the power of truth imposed restraint, with respect to the character of the father, the virtues of the beloved Jonathan are displayed with all the energy and tenderness of friendship. Upon this part of his subject the heart of David overflowed; and thus, while he mourned the untimely end of one whom he justly esteemed as a brother, he was enabled to cover the injuries which he had received from Saul in the praises of his gallant and generous son. To the valour of both, equal honour is given; and when at last a distinction is made, it is only to describe the unchangeable union that subsisted between David and his friend. "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women!" From this expression of particular sorrow for one who so well merited his grateful remembrance, the royal poet rises again to pour out one exalted strain of encomium upon the departed heroes, whom he delineates by a bold but happy stroke, as the army of Israel and its chief glory: "How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!" If this performance shows a liberal mind, the circumstances in which the author was now placed will raise him higher in our estimation; for at this very time measures were concerting to perpetuate the royal succession in the family of Saul, by placing one of his sons upon the vacant throne. But the spirit of David was superior to every selfish consideration; and the same principle which led him to honour the memory of the dead, made him act with equal candour and forbearance to the living.

Knowing that the same gracious Being who had kept and supported him hitherto, would fulfill his promises, he left the season and the means alike to his sovereign will and goodness; saying, "The

Lord will perfect that which concerneth me : thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever : forsake not the works of thine own hands." Ps. cxxxviii, 8.

APRIL THE THIRTIETH.

THE BATTLE OF GIBEON.

2 Samuel, ii. 26.—*Then Abner called to Joab and said, Shall the sword devour for ever? Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? How long shall it be then ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?*

THE restoration of David was distinguished by some remarkable circumstances, which present an interesting picture of ancient manners, and at the same time afford some important lessons of moral instruction. Though consecrated by Samuel, and admitted by the confession of Saul himself, to be the person appointed as his successor, yet on the death of that unhappy monarch, Judah alone acknowledged the regal title of David. The other tribes, through the influence of Abner, adhered to the house of Saul, which produced a civil war between the two great branches of the kingdom. This attachment of Abner to the family of which he was a member, reflects greater credit upon his integrity than his judgment. With a high-minded sense of right he conceived it to be his duty to maintain the hereditary succession, without considering that the Power from whence the dominion came had transferred the grant to another line. In his views of loyalty, Abner confined himself to the mere circumstance of possession, and overlooked the tenure by which it was held of that Infinite Majesty, who gives and takes away kingdoms at his

pleasure. Unquestionably had David enjoyed no better plea than what was founded upon the sword, this opposition to his elevation would have been fully justified; but before Abner came to that determination, he ought to have inquired into the nature of those pretensions which he took upon him to resist. His error, however, was that of a liberal mind; for with the same means which he used to establish Ishbosheth upon the throne, he might as easily have secured it for himself. His regard to the order of inheritance, and the zeal displayed by him for its preservation, proceeded from a conscientious persuasion that he was in the path of honour, and discharging the obligations belonging to him as the prime minister and general of the kingdom. Both David and Abner therefore were governed by upright motives, and their very contention proceeded from a conviction of this truth, that government is a Divine institution. But the king of Judah had an especial commission for the foundation of his claim; while Abner acted solely from the impulse of his own feelings, and was guided by the honest but mistaken notion, that the crown having been once placed upon the head of Saul must descend to his posterity. In the war that ensued upon this occasion, an incident happened too curious to be passed over without some remark. The occurrence was this: when the two armies met at Gibeon, it was proposed by Abner that twelve youths should be selected from each party to play, or contend, in the presence of their respective generals. To this Joab, the commander of the army of David, consented; and so furious was the combat, that the whole of the warriors on the side of Israel were slain. It has been supposed by some, that this was a kind of gladiatorial exhibition, or a trial of skill between the most active men belonging to the two powers. But the matter was of higher import than that of affording amusement to

the leaders, or of inspiring their troops. Such duels were intended as oracular consultations, to ascertain the justice and success of the cause in dispute; and this explains the circumstance of twelve persons being chosen in this instance, agreeable to the number of the tribes who constituted the body of the nation. The battle which ensued ended in favour of Judah; and as the general of Israel fled from the field, he was closely pressed by Asahel, the brother of Joab; but though Abner was in imminent danger of his life, he was unwilling to take away that of his pursuer, even in his own defence. Twice did he warn Asahel from following him; but the impetuous youth, ambitious of the honour of seizing so great a prey, was deaf to remonstrance, and became in consequence the victim of his temerity.

This conduct of Abner places his character in an illustrious point of view, as it shows the forbearance of his disposition in a moment when the sense of disgrace and the passion of resentment might have prompted the infliction of vengeance upon the brother of his inveterate foe. But the virtue of this great man shines with peculiar lustre in his address to Joab, when having gained a place of security and received reinforcements, which enabled him to renew the conflict with advantage, the sentiment of pity overpowered that of revenge. "Then Abner called to Joab and said, Shall the sword devour for ever? Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? How long shall it be then ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?" At this time the general of Israel was perfectly safe from attack, and surrounded by auxiliaries, ready to fall upon the men of Judah; so that it was not fear which drew from him this expostulation, but an anxious desire to prevent all farther carnage.

To this benevolent spirit a striking contrast was presented in the savage career of Joab, who tarnished

the laurels he had won by his cruelty, and the wanton waste of human life. The remonstrance of Abner, however, had the effect of putting an end to the contest, and the forces of each party returned peaceably to their respective homes. The violence of domestic fury is forcibly portrayed in this history, and the call upon the successful general to use his victory with moderation, is a lesson of humanity for every age and meridian of the world. Among the scourges with which Providence visits the iniquities of nations, the sword is one of the most tremendous; but as it is committed to the hands of men, an awful responsibility accompanies the affecting trust. As nothing but the sense of justice can warrant an appeal to arms, so whatever exceeds that principle is robbery, and the blood that is shed without absolute necessity is murder. Under the most favourable circumstances the evil is most dreadful to the vanquished and injurious to their conquerors, who frequently become vain and arrogant by success; while others, who are not interested in the contest, too often take an unnatural delight in representations, which render them insensible to the misery of depopulated countries and the shocking spectacle of garments rolled in blood. Let it be our endeavour then to attain the pacific disposition and spirit of love, which, if generally cultivated, would hasten the glorious state we are directed to pray for in our daily devotions, and which is so beautifully described in prophecy, as characterizing the reign of the Messiah, when "the people shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Is. ii. 4.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

S. GOSWELL, Printer, Little Queen Street, London.

